



SIX LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM SPORT'S LEGENDARY COACHES

How to Win Your Team's Trust, Loyalty, and Respect

“Am I someone who I would want to work for?” This is the question that FedEx Senior Vice President Bill Logue often uses to help his Managing Directors, Senior Managers, and front-line managers reflect on the quality of their leadership skills. It's one that you should continually ask yourself as well.

Ironically, legendary women's basketball coach Pat Summitt readily admits that she probably would not have wanted to play for herself early in her career. “I don't know if I could have played for me early on. I was hard on them and myself and everyone around me. I thought I had to be. My ideas on how to command respect have changed... I've learned that you can't demand it, or whack it out of people with a two-by-four. You have to cultivate it, in yourself and those around you.”

Based on the leadership lessons of sport's legendary coaches like Pat Summitt, John Wooden, Don Shula, Mike Krzyzewski, Phil Jackson, Vince Lombardi and numerous others, here are six principles that will help you win your team's trust, loyalty, and respect.

1. All leadership starts with self leadership.

We've all heard the saying, "It all starts at the top." This phrase could not be more true when it comes to the kind of impact you have on your organization's success. Your leadership

is the key component in deciding whether your group will perform to its potential or fall short of it.

Don't get me wrong. Certainly your employees are a huge part of the success equation. They are the ones who actually do the work and deserve much of the credit when your company does well. Yet without your ability to attract, motivate, develop, discipline, produce, and keep good people, your organization has little chance of being successful in the long run. As a leader, you are the one who sets the tone for your organization and the person who is ultimately responsible for creating a winning culture.

“If the coach is organized, everything falls into place. If he has self-discipline, then the team has discipline. If he's dedicated, the team is dedicated. Everything revolves around the head coach. He's the one who has to make the team go.”

Ray Nitschke, Former Green Bay Packer Coached by Vince Lombardi

“An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

The foundation of self-leadership is character. This core principle has become painfully evident to companies like Enron, Worldcom, and Tyco and coaches like Mike Price, Jim Harrick, and Larry Eustachy who chose to violate it. Character means that you not only *know* what is right in a particular situation, you are also willing to *do* what is right no matter the consequences. The trouble is that most leaders know the right thing to do. The difficult part for them is doing it because of the enormous pressures to maximize profits and share holder value.

Successful leaders have forged a philosophy of leadership and use it as a guide for the decisions they make. Effective leaders know what they stand for and live their philosophy on a daily basis. They place principles over winning at all costs. They are unwilling to sell out their long-term success, satisfaction, or principles for short-term financial gains. Successful leaders are aware that victories can be very hollow and short-lived if they are at the expense of bending rules. If you have not done so, take some time to write down your philosophy of leadership.

Develop Your Own Peer Resource Team

Because there are so many gray areas in leadership, former Nebraska volleyball coach Terry Pettit strongly encourages leaders of all levels to develop their own Peer Resource Team. A Peer Resource Team is a small group of people who are genuinely interested in you and can serve as trusted advisors when you need to make difficult decisions. They can be a sounding board for your ideas. They can help you sort out your conflicting thoughts. They can allow you to vent your frustrations. And they can give you support and keep you sane during times of stress. A Peer Resource Team is a specialized collection of people you can count on to help you survive and thrive in the up and down world of leadership. Take a moment to assess who your Peer Resource Team might be - your spouse, mentor, former supervisor, friends, clergy, etc.? If you do not have a reliable Peer Resource Team, make it a priority to develop one over the next three months.

2. Determine a compelling vision for your team/organization.

Every year an underdog takes the sporting world by storm. Somehow a team no one expects to win half of their games, puts it all together and ends up competing and sometimes winning a championship. How does this happen? It all starts with a successful vision which guides, inspires, and galvanizes a group to go for greatness.

As a leader, you must create a compelling vision of success for your people and your organization. Most great accomplishments begin with a dream of what could be. Regardless of the present state of your company and industry, spend a significant amount of time thinking about possibilities. What could your organization achieve if your people consistently gave you their best, worked well as a team, and made a total commitment to quality?

Granted, it's pretty easy to have visions of greatness when you have talented people.

The real challenge is envisioning a bright future when morale is lacking, losses are mounting, and the economy is stagnant. It is this vision of a better future that will keep both you and your people positive and optimistic as your team makes the climb to the top.

When thinking about your vision for your organization, I encourage you to dream about the possibilities if everything fell into place the way you think it could. What could you accomplish? Once you have established the ideal outcome, you need to formulate a realistic and workable plan for your team to follow. You must break your vision down into practical steps that your people can execute on a daily basis. You have got to be convinced that your plan will work because ultimately you will be selling it to your people.

“My first act of being named head coach was to formulate a vision for the team. I started by creating a vivid picture in my mind of what the team could become. I had to take into account not only what I wanted to achieve, but how I was going to get there.”

Phil Jackson, Los Angeles Lakers

Once you have developed a vision, it is necessary to let others see the passion you have for it. You have to be sold on it and be able to sell others in your organization on it. One way to do that is to live your vision every day. Walk it and talk it with passion. To begin to assess your degree of passion, take a few minutes to honestly answer the following questions:

- Do you still have a passion for your company’s products and/or services?
- Do you feel like your organization makes a meaningful difference in people’s lives?
- Do you get excited to go to work every day?
- Do you look forward to tackling new projects and challenges?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” you will have a hard time conveying optimism and enthusiasm to your employees. They will see the apathy in your face and hear it in your voice. This lack of passion has a profound effect on your people and your organization. There is an old saying, "Attitudes are contagious, make yours worth catching." Credible leaders have attitudes worth catching because they have a passion for their products and services. They love what they do and seem to be totally invested in what they are doing. Credible leaders are so passionate about the company they almost feel as if the company chose them, rather than them choosing the company.

“You can’t lead others to places you don’t want to go yourself.”

James Kouzes and Barry Posner, Authors of *Encouraging the Heart*

“If you aren’t fired with enthusiasm, you will be fired with enthusiasm.”

Vince Lombardi, Former Green Bay Packers Coach

3. Surround yourself with talented people of solid character.

Every leader is only as good as his or her team. It is your job to successfully recruit and retain the top talent for your organization. You must look to surround yourself with passionate people who share your passion and enthusiasm for your company’s vision. As Jim Collins wrote in *Good to Great*, the best companies seek to get the right people on the bus and the wrong people off of it.

In fact, the key to becoming a successful leader is to recruit and hire people who are better than you are. Do you have the guts and good sense to hire someone who has more talent and skill than you do? Most leader’s egos get in the way of their own success. They are afraid to hire people who could replace them. What they don’t realize is that hiring the top talent only reflects positively on everyone and bolsters their credibility as a leader.

While talent is critical, it is not the only variable on which to base your recruiting and hiring decisions. Many leaders have a tendency to overlook a person’s character in the interview and selection process, especially when the person is supremely talented. Because they are focused on the bottom line and not the culture of the company, some leaders knowingly recruit employees with questionable character. Even though they don’t completely trust the person and realize that he or she is likely to be disruptive to the culture, too many leaders gamble on questionable employees solely because of their talent. While they might be successful in the short term, unfortunately in many cases these choices come back to haunt them and the organization.

“When I drafted on talent, looking the other way regarding character, I have been burned almost every time.” Don Nelson, Dallas Mavericks

“Although I realize that I’m not going to win in the NFL without some extraordinarily skilled players, character has always been just as important to me - and in some cases, more important.” Don Shula, Former Miami Dolphins Coach

4. Hold your people accountable to a higher standard.

Athletes often describe their coaches as being very demanding people. They continually push their athletes, urging and encouraging them to attain higher levels of performance. Mediocrity is something that successful coaches absolutely hate; they won't settle for anything less than the athlete's best. Tennessee women's basketball coach Pat Summitt says, "I ask our players to give more of themselves than they think is possible. I know they have more inside of them. I know it. That's why I set such high standards for them."

Do you demand excellence from your people? Is there a certain standard that distinguishes your products and services? As Vince Lombardi said, "Winning is a habit. Excellence is not a sometimes thing, it's an all the time thing." Therefore you must cultivate that habit in your people by insisting that your employees hold themselves and each other to a higher standard. Foster a sense of personal pride in their craftsmanship and service.

“I really believe that if a leader is a stickler on high performance, on excellence, then winning games will be a natural by-product.” Coach Mike Krzyzewski, Duke Men's Basketball

Peter Friedes, the former CEO of Hewitt Associates, has written an insightful book called *The 2R Manager*. Friedes' premise is that successful managers must have the ability to effectively require things from their employees as well as relate to them as people - hence a 2R Manager (Requiring and Relating). He goes on to state that the vast majority of managers are more comfortable using one of the styles over the other. Are you more comfortable relating with or requiring things of your people? Do you know when to push your people and when to back off?

Because they invest the time to get to know each of their employees, successful leaders know when to be demanding and when to ease up and support them. They know when they should push their people past their own perceived limitations, fears, and

laziness to help them achieve breakthroughs to higher levels of performance. They also know when to ease up, provide more support and coaching, and build people up again. They can sense when a person might be getting too frustrated or discouraged and take the time to encourage them. As a leader, you want to push your people to set and achieve stretch goals, but you definitely don't want to break their spirit.

5. Show and tell your people that you care about them.

If you truly want to be a successful leader you must like working with people. After all, leaders are really in the people development business. Successful leaders genuinely care about all aspects of their employees' lives. They are interested in each person's overall success, not just what the employee can do for them on the job. They take the time to get to know their employees on a personal level, being interested in their family, friends, faith, and future goals.

North Carolina men's basketball coach Roy Williams believes that showing your people that you care about their overall well being is extremely important.

He says, "Players do need to feel that we care. I think they need to feel even more so that we care for them off the court. On the court they know we're trying to win. They understand that. But off the court I want the kids to understand how important it is that I care about what they do academically; caring that they are on progress toward a degree."

"One of the finest things a players could say about me after he left the team was that I cared every bit about him as an individual as I care about him as an athlete."

John Wooden, Former UCLA Men's Basketball Coach

How Much Do You Know About Your Employees as People?

Take a moment to assess how much you know about your employees' lives away from the office.

- What are their interests and hobbies?
- Do you know who their friends are?
- What kind of relationship do they have with their parents, spouse, and children?
- Do they have any brothers or sisters?
- When are their birthdays?

These are all important questions to your employees. If they are important to them, then they also should be important to you.

Each of these outside variables impacts your peoples' mood, focus, confidence, and commitment. It is in everyone's best interest that you have a sufficient knowledge about what is going on with each of your employees outside of the office. Knowing that a person's father was just diagnosed with cancer might help you to be a little more understanding when he is struggling on the job. Or congratulating one of your employees because his daughter was accepted into the college of her choice is a great way to make his day. Cutting out an article you saw in the paper that relates to your one of your employee's hobbies shows him that you are interested.

The best way to get to know your employees better is to invest the time to informally chat with them. Ask them how their families are doing or how their weekend went. Too many leaders have a tendency to only talk with their people about the job. Instead, invest the time to get to know them as people.

The key to gaining your employees' trust is to create an open, interested, nonjudgmental, and supportive environment. Some may open up to you very quickly while others, because of their nature or personality, may take months or even years. Keep in mind that you can't force them to open up and you don't need to know absolutely everything about your employees. However, you do need to show them that you are sincerely interested in them as people.

6. Clarify and appreciate each person's role.

Your goal as a leader is to have your people understand, accept, and even embrace their roles in your organization. When each person accepts her role and takes pride in playing it, your team has its best chance of being successful. While typically there is little challenge in getting people to accept the "glamour" roles of in your organization , it's a lot tougher to get people to accept the secondary roles. How do you get your players to understand and accept their roles?

“Sometimes the player’s greatest challenge is coming to grips with his role on the team.” Scottie Pippen, Chicago Bulls

Getting people to accept their roles is not something that happens magically. As a leader you play a key role in helping employees embrace their roles. Role acceptance depends on two things:

- 1.) Clearly defining each person’s role.
- 2.) Regularly demonstrating your appreciation for their contribution.

Your company’s success is highly dependent on your employees ability to accept their roles. In order for each person to accept the role he is given, he must feel like his role is an important one to the team’s success. He must value his role and believe that he is an important contributor to the team. A person will value his role when it is appreciated by his coworkers and especially by you as the leader. By communicating with your people to help them define and clarify their roles, you can also let them know how important you consider their role to be to the team’s success.

Keep these six principles in mind as you look to lead your team to greatness. Just as these leadership principles have helped sport’s legendary coaches build dynasties, so too will they help you build an enduring, high-performance, profitable organization.

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