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Coach Your Way to Managerial Success

by David S. Duncan

If you want to increase your managerial success, focus on improving your coaching skills rather than your managerial skills. What is the difference between managing and coaching? In its simplest sense, a manager focuses on himself. A coach focuses on others. Let me give you a couple of examples of the difference between managing and coaching.

Example #1

If you have a garden at home and you want to grow flowers, can you actually *force* flowers to grow? Of course not. You can plant the seed, provide the sunlight, till and enrich the soil, pull weeds, provide water and care — and from there, all that you can do is to have confidence that you've done everything possible to make the flower a reality. A manager screams, "I want beautiful flowers!" A coach focuses on the plant and says, "I want a plant that is beautiful."

Example #2

If you have small children, can you *teach* your children anything? No. You can teach a child nothing, because in reality your children must choose to *learn*. A manager focuses on teaching; a coach focuses on learning. A manager wants a child that makes him look good. A coach wants a child who *is* good.

If you have managerial responsibilities, there is some implication in your job title that you manage people. Similar to forcing a flower to grow or forcing a child to learn, you can't manage anyone. Not only is it impossible to manage, but also some of us as managers even make it worse by micromanaging! You *cannot* manage. All you can do is provide the right environment and conditions for success. After that, it's up to each member of your team to choose to succeed.

So forget about being a "better" manager because there is very little that you actually manage other than yourself (and at times, even this is questionable!). Instead, be your team's coach!

I really enjoy watching football. In fact, I enjoy watching the post-game interview with each team's coach as much as I do the game itself. There is something common in each interview that takes place. If the team performs poorly, have you ever noticed that the coach blames himself? And if the team performs at the top of its game, you will hear how the coach gives all of the credit to 'that great bunch of kids that prepared hard and pour their hearts out on the field.'"

We all admire great coaches — Paul Brown, Lou Holtz, Vince Lombardi, Pat Riley, Phil Jackson, John Wooden — wow! What makes them so great? Why do business executives want them to speak with their corporate executives? Because they want them to share their secrets about what it takes to build winning teams and to learn about the characteristics of a successful and winning coach. What are some of those characteristics?

- **Hiring and Retaining Top Talent**

Regardless of your company's product, you are in the PEOPLE business. Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, says, "We are not in the coffee business serving people. We are in the people business serving coffee." Your business and your success hinges on the people that you hire and retain. A successful coach gets and keeps the best talent.

- **Others-Centered**

A successful coach knows that his success is 100 percent dependent on the success of the team, and that the team's success is dependent on the success of each individual on that team. A top-tier coach knows his people. He knows everything about them and what makes them tick. He meets them at their point of need so that they can do well.

In the book "Leading With The Heart," Duke University basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski says, "My goal is to get to



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know my players and what they can do. My total focus is finding out who we are....”

If you care about others, they are much more likely to care about you. If you care about the success of others, they are also more likely to care about your success. A winning coach has the trust and admiration of his people.

A selfless coach knows that all goals are shared, and so are the results and rewards. Everyone gets a Superbowl ring on the winning team.

- **Results and Improvement Orientation**

A successful coach knows what has to be done and sets the bar high so that each team member strives to be the best that he can be. A poor coach just wants a “win.” A poor coach just focuses on the scoreboard numbers. A great coach will focus on the execution of the fundamentals that lead to the points on the board and to the ultimate win.

A successful coach does not know it all. Every season, every person, every team and every situation will have its unique challenges. We can only respond to those challenges by choosing to learn and by growing. We all know of teams that have reached the summit of victory, and how difficult it seems to be to repeat that summit in a subsequent season. Taking things to the next level requires a higher level of knowledge as well. We must grow personally and professionally.

- **Set a Personal Example**

Perhaps the greatest leadership quality of a successful coach is for him to be himself. We search for authentic leaders, and no two great coaches are alike. If your outside actions are inconsistent with your inside motivators and personal compass, you will be unsuccessful as a coach.

A great coach knows that he has his own set of strengths and weaknesses and also knows the same about his team members. A winning coach builds around the strengths of each player, including himself.

A successful coach also expects no more of a team member than he expects of himself. The coach shows up early and stays late. He inspires with his example,

demeanor, attitude, desire to learn and work ethic. He is honest and takes personal responsibility for his actions and activities. He is respected not because he demands it, but because he earns it.

- **Provide the Resources**

A successful coach gives his players the resources that they need to get the job done — winning teams will have computers that work, offices that are nice, unlocked supply cabinets and available money.

I would advise you to quit worrying about “managing to your expense budget.” If this is where you are spending your time as a manager, I can guarantee that you are needlessly nickeling and diming your team members and wasting valuable time that could be spent more productively. Think about it. Rather than spending your time tracking your expense budget, suppose you spent the same amount of time achieving your business goals. Let’s also suppose that you exceed your expense budget. If you were successful in achieving your goals, no one will even notice that you exceeded the budget. If you were unsuccessful in achieving your goals, exceeding your expense budget would be the least of your problems. Spend your time doing the right things and give your team the resources they need. This investment will reward you handsomely.

Summary

Hire the right people, get to know them and focus on their success. Set the bar high, set a good personal example and provide the resources to get the job done. *Coach* your team and they will manage *you* to success. □

