



How Winning Works: 8 Essential Leadership Lessons from the Toughest Teams on Earth – Part 2

Empathy and Awareness of Teammates

"We don't follow titles...we follow ties" -- RB

Inspiring and Demonstrating Empathy and Awareness:

Connect to the Person Before the Point:

When interacting with another teammate during the course of the day, take just 30 seconds to let that person know that you SEE THEM (the friend, the co-worker, the wife, the dad, the XYZ) before you dive right into what you need from them. :) It doesn't take much, often just a "how did your son do on his final exams?" or "how was your daughter's soccer championship" or even "how ARE you" (and really actually wait for an answer :), but it strengthens that bridge to our teammates when they know we care about THEM, the human being. And when times are tough or there are huge hairy goals ahead, those interpersonal bonds are the key to success. When it comes to motivation and perseverance, we'll drive harder for our "friends".

Coaching versus Criticism:

When we need to address performance with a teammate, always try to err on the side of coaching versus criticizing. How can you ensure that your teammate can tell the difference? When you criticize, you are perceived as "pointing a finger" at your teammate. When you coach, you are genuinely extending a hand and asking how you can help. A slight difference in intent and delivery makes all the difference. And you will get a heck of a lot more buy-in from your teammate when they understand that you believe in them, are in their corner, and are offering to help them succeed.

Remember that we work for *people*, not for *companies*:

World Class Teammates are constantly demonstrating and inspiring, in word and in deed, how to be the kind of leader/team member that other people want to work WITH and work for. When the best path/response/action isn't clear, think about the best, most motivating leader or teammate you have had in your life, and ask yourself "what would X do right now"? You can never go wrong when you consistently DWR (Do What's Right). It's a simple code to live by, you will never have any regrets, and you'll inspire others to DWR along the way!

Adversity Management

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy" --Martin Luther King Jr.

"Change is the only thing that stays the same...it's out response to those changes that dictates our success" --Phoenix Fire Department Chief, Alan Brunacini

Inspiring and Demonstrating Adversity Management:

See Challenges Versus Roadblocks:

Your attitude and your response to times of great challenge and change dictates your long term success. The best of the best inspire themselves and their teammates to always see a "challenge", never a roadblock. The human spirit is wired to rise to the occasion!

Be Ruled by the "Hope of Success" versus the "Fear of Failure":

When faced with a difficult challenge or times of change, observe yourself in action; Are you driven to do what it takes to WIN or are you simply doing what it takes to NOT LOSE? Where you set your focus completely changes who you are and HOW you operate, and leads you down two different paths, to two vastly different finish lines. Try focusing on and planning your next moves based upon where you WANT to go instead of focusing on all of the things you are worried might happen. This works for mountain biking too, btw! :) Every time I've found myself in the dirt next to my bike, it was because I was focusing on the dreaded obstacle in the trail instead of the clearest path to success!

Embrace Setbacks and Challenges as a Springboard to Future Success:

One of the many hallmarks of a World Class Team is their ability to realize, in the moment, that their challenges will lead them to something much better in the future, and they embrace those times of change and uncertainty as a chance to get a jump on future success. Pain brings progress. And with the right attitude and a certain fierceness with which we tackle our challenges head on, we often look back a few years later and say to ourselves and our teammates, "in a lot of ways, that crazy time was the best thing that ever happened to us". And it's true!

Never let the Pursuit of Perfection Hinder Progress:

Conditions are rarely ever perfect, and the results that we envisioned and reality are often at odds, but it shouldn't keep us from moving forward and doing the very best we can with what we have in the moment, every minute, every day. Success is a journey, and not a destination. And the best teammates inspire everyone around them to persevere, make the best of a crazy situation, and never ever lose that drive to do "whatever it takes" to get to the finish line.

Mutual Respect

"Loyalty means not that I agree with everything you say or that I believe you are always right. Loyalty means that I share a common ideal with you, and that, regardless of minor differences, we strive for it, shoulder to shoulder, confident in one another's good faith, trust, constancy and affection." ----Karl Menninger

Inspiring and Demonstrating Mutual Respect:

Remember the Aluminum Can Theory:

The Aluminum Can Theory is an entertaining concept created by Alan Brunacini, one of the most inspiring and engaging Fire Chiefs in history (and one of my personal heroes :). He said "When you have disagreement with someone on your crew and you're compelled to go right to the one terrible comment that you know will take them to their knees...remember that comment is an aluminum can...it's going to stay in the environment forever." World Class Teams never let those aluminum cans come between teammates. They consistently avoid gossip, criticism and backstabbing, as those behaviors will destroy a hard won trust. Conversely, there are Positive Aluminum Cans (ie: telling a teammate about how impactful, amazing, or talented they are and why), and great teammates will share them in abundance.

Mentor Unselfishly:

World Class Teammates understand that "Knowledge *SHARED* is power", and they are consistently bringing one another up to speed on best practices, the latest techniques, new discoveries, etc. Everyone gets better...together, and the rising tide raises all ships! Always be wary of "teammates" who derive their power by knowing things that others don't know.

Act Like a Team Always...The Feelings Will Follow:

Let's face it! We're not always going to feel all fluffy and purple dinosaurs (I love you, you love me) about each other! But World Class Teammates will always ACT like a great leader or act like great teammate, regardless of the feelings. Bottom line: Acting like a team is more important than feeling like a team. :). The positive feelings will always come back when our actions inspire them.

Believe in Teammates Beyond Reason:

What happens when someone believes in us? It makes us want to rise to the occasion and prove them right. And if someone doesn't believe in us? We tend to want to prove them right as well. Believing in someone is a powerful force...and a gift that great teammates give to one another every day.

Give Respect as a Gift--Not as a Grade:

Building and leading a World Class Team inherently means that everyone is given 100% respect for their experience, opinions, contributions, knowledge, etc, right off the bat, versus creating an environment in which little respect is given and must constantly be earned. Trust me, as a firefighter, I live in a world where respect must always be earned and can be withdrawn at any moment. It's definitely not conducive to world class teamwork or results when teammates are constantly battling one another for recognition or pride. When respect is given as a gift and not withheld as a grade, teammates feel valued, worthy, engaged, free to learn, and have increased ownership of outcomes. Respect is also the super glue that bonds teammates together in times of great challenge and change.

We Thinking

"None of us is as smart as all of us" -- Ken Blanchard

"The secret is to play less as an individual and more as a team. As a coach, I play not my eleven best, but my best eleven"-- Vince Lombardi

Inspiring and Demonstrating "We Thinking":

Choose a goal that can't be accomplished alone and build a world class team to achieve it:

The best of the best in any challenging endeavor didn't get to the finish line alone; they had mentors, great teammates, sponsors, a supportive family, and they consistently surrounded themselves with people that could push or tow them to the next level. In our business lives, we should always be reaching out to others in pursuit of our goals for ourselves, and, most importantly, our clients and customers. Just like a tree, we can only grow so tall before we need to widen our base and extend our roots...only then can we grow even taller. It's not a weakness to seek teammates when faced with a big challenge or a huge hairy audacious goal...it's a strength!!

"Suffer Equally"-- Offer and Accept Tow Lines:

This is a funny term that one of my teammates came up with to describe how a world class adventure racing team operates. World Class Teams are always finding a way to "suffer equally" during the race, whether that means taking some weight from a struggling teammate's pack when we feel strong, or grabbing a tow line from a teammate when we're at our lowest point. Teammates who are consistently sharing their strengths AND their weaknesses/challenges will always get to the finish line before a team of superstar soloists in the long run.

Seek Synergy Everywhere:

The best leaders have a knack for creating synergy in every interaction, because they are consistently operating with the intention of a teammate: They always try to find the win/win, they bring more value than they take, and they walk out of their front door every day and see a world full of teammates versus a world full of competitors. This energy draws people to us and brings out the teambuilders in them. It's amazing how much people will give when the person across the table from them has the intention to give back.

Ownership of the Project

"People tend to embrace that which they create" -- Anonymous

Demonstrating and Inspiring Ownership of the Project:

Hire the Inspired:

When you bring new people onto your team within your business or in your life, make sure that they are not only capable of performing at a world class level, but that they are truly inspired at a deep level by your vision, mission, values and the people served by your organization. Many jobs can be learned, but inspiration is an inside job, and in many cases, that real sense of purpose and ownership of outcomes is of equal importance to the technical side of the job.

Inspire Your Hires:

How do we inspire people who are currently on our team? Here are a few key ways to create real ownership of your mission and outcomes:

* Discover teammates' strengths and let them lead in those areas of strength, experience, and ability

* Ask your teammates what they are hoping to get out of working with you and your organization. In other words, what is their "why"? What inspires them to do their best? I guarantee you will get as many different answers as you have teammates. Everyone has a different reason/goal for why they do what they do, and it's not always the drive for more money. Some teammates want mentorship (someone who "sees" them and their potential and can help them move forward), others want recognition, etc. If you can discover what that is for each teammate and help them get it, you'll create a great deal of ownership.

* Ask for teammates' input on strategy, tactics and goals. People tend to embrace that which they help create.

Relinquishment of Ego

"You've got to leave your ego at the starting line...it's the heaviest thing in your pack" --Adventure Racing wisdom :)

"Strategically placed testosterone has never put out a fire"--Alan Brunacini, Phoenix Fire Department Chief

"It's amazing what can be accomplished when nobody cares who gets the credit" --John Wooden

Inspiring and Demonstrating Relinquishment of Ego:

Ask for Help and Accept Help--It's a Gift to the Helper:

One of the tell-tale signs that you've got great teammates is how willing they are to rely on one another and to ask each other for help when they need it, without the fear that they will appear "weak", but with the understanding that, in helping one another, they will ultimately help the team succeed. This is easy in an adventure race, where we very literally need help to keep moving forward. :) In the business world, most of us are, understandably, reluctant to ask for help. If asking for help or accepting help is hard for you, think of accepting help as a "gift" to the helper. It always is! Doesn't it make you feel great when you're able to advise or guide a colleague? Give that gift to others and let them help you. You've also created a great bond between yourself and your teammates when you do. Bottom line is that you haven't used all of your strength as a leader or teammate until you've asked for help.

Give Away the Credit:

A great way to continue to inspire your teammates and build solid bonds with them is to consistently give away credit for success to everyone on the team. You've seen the best of the best do this in sports, ala Michael Jordan, who inherently understood that his teammates would work harder

to set him up for success when they trusted him to share the credit. The same is true in business. When we gracefully share credit for our success with others, the right teammates will do the same in return. Ultimately the *team* wins when competitiveness is replaced by loyalty, respect, and the trust that all teammates' names will be on that symbolic trophy.

Feed your Ego with your Team's Success--Not your Individual Glory:

Our ego is a powerful force, but as is the case with all powerful forces, we must harness it for good versus evil. :) None of us got to a high level in our careers without a strong ego. But world class teammates feed their ego by helping the *team* succeed: When they are the strongest team member, they demonstrate that strength by helping someone else versus getting to the top of the mountain ahead of the pack; If they are the smartest or most capable teammate at the moment, they offer that wisdom and guidance to the team, or mentor others; And, most importantly, when they are the most challenged teammate at the time, they raise their hand and ask for help, knowing that accepting help is the best thing they can do to help their team get across the finish line first!

Kinetic Leadership

A company is like a ship...everyone should be prepared to take the helm.
-- Henrik Ibsen

Leadership is not a privilege...it's a responsibility.
--Firefighter Jeff Akens

Demonstrating and Inspiring Kinetic Leadership:

Change Leaders--

There is a big difference between management and leadership. Being a manager implies that you are the person formally charged with directing and facilitating the success of others. But a leader is someone who INSPIRES others to be at their best, and who is prepared to step up to the plate and be the person to drive the success of the team based upon their strengths and not their title. Therefore, everyone on the team should be ready to lead (and expected to lead!), and the best managers will allow those "informal" leaders to continually emerge. After all, the most important job of a leader is to create other leaders.

Change Leadership Styles--

It's poetic and powerful to watch a great leader step up to the plate and become exactly whom their teammates need at the moment. The best Teambuilders know their teammates well, and are constantly listening for, assessing, and striving to deeply understand the needs of each individual and the team as a whole, so that they may maximize potential and outcomes. When it's business as usual, a team sometimes needs a visionary, a coach, a friend, or to feel like they're part of the decision making...in times of great challenge or change the team often needs a strong pacesetter to get out front and show them the way or to simply tell them exactly what to do and when (...to be utilized sparingly! But as a firefighter I appreciate those leadership styles when we roll up on a house engulfed with flames :) . Bottom line: leadership styles should be utilized and interchanged similar to the way a golfer chooses his clubs: If we continually assess conditions, learn the lay of the land and choose just the right club for the job, we increase our chances of long term, consistent success from our team.



WorldClassTeams
"adventures in teambuilding"