

## Lessons In Leadership

### A Look At The Fine Art Of Leadership Through The Eyes Of A Softball Coach

#### FORWARD.

I once remember my dad saying to me that, the most important things you learn in life are those things you learn once you thought you knew it all. I never really acknowledged the importance or the natural impact of that statement, until I coached ladies softball.

Although my coaching career spans a mere seven years, my experiences and professional relationships are the equivalent of twenty plus years. I have had the opportunity to work with several excellent softball coaches but, what is better they were and still are tremendous human beings.

These men will probably never coach a provincial softball team nor, will they ever be added to the coaching staff of a national softball team, because they're not connected nor are they interested in being in the political arena that is derived from that position. They just want to coach and win at the game of softball; and win they do. Dean, Ray, David and Roger, all have one thing in common, they have forgotten more about the game and learned more about the players who play the game than most coaches can dream of learning.

Dean Garriock is a person who understands all aspects of the game of softball, especially defense and pitching. He expects the absolute best from his players and in return, he shares with the ladies his knowledge, wisdom and enthusiasm for the game.

Ray Turner, the best softball hitting coach in Canada is a person who looks for attitude. The more intense the player, the better for Ray. A true believer in offensive power he breaks the hitting game down into small, digestible elements.

David Haick is probably the finest and most generous person in the sport of softball. A great evaluator of talent, David tells it like it is. He puts his heart and time into the sport and expects his players to do the same. He is patient, relentless and compassionate.

Roger Davis is a student of the player. He studies the mental side of the game and communicates his commitment much the same way. A true believer in the Yogi Berra theory that the game is 80% mental and 50% physical, he instills in his players the need to think on the field - all the time.

Over the past four years I have coached with these four gentlemen and here are the lessons that they have taught me. It is belief that these lessons are not only applicable in softball, they also provide a value base to business.

#### LESSON ONE

Leadership has little to do with personality and even less to do with charisma. Leadership is honouring your people and expecting the same.

Any leader can go out and hire skill and knowledge. Just like any coach can recruit good softball players and capitalize on the hard work that other coaches have done and take credit because they won a national title. The true test of a leader is in building an individual's self esteem and self image by building employee skill and knowledge. The winning team result is a symptom of instilling employee self confidence and self esteem once the foundation of skill and knowledge base are in place.

The real test of a good leader becomes evident when players barely know that they exist and not so good when people despise them. The good leader offers an abundance of constructive feedback and listens well; and when their work is done and goals are fulfilled, the team all say, we did it ourselves.

#### LESSON TWO

As a leader you must surround yourself with good people; people who are knowledgeable and allow you to draw upon their wisdom. People you can trust and talk openly and honestly with. People who will tell you what they think and why, not what you want to hear.

Good leaders recognize the fact you cannot build a team different from its leadership. Good leaders magnify their own abilities by surrounding themselves with good people. They recognize that they have limitations. They cannot do it all by themselves because they don't have all the answers nor the expertise. Leaders learn from the pros. They observe them and seek them out as mentors and partners.

The focus is on being the best. If you focus on being the best, you will have the best management team, the best employees, the best products, the best services, the best of everything. Being the best is a mind set and the most basic goal of a leader because it allows people to set higher goals. The leader recognizes that a strong management team is the spine around which all the team's performance takes place.

Only by surrounding yourself with good people will leaders accomplish great things and have fun doing it.

### LESSON THREE

Being a leader means being responsible, accepting accountability and exercising authority.

Good leadership involves responsibility to the welfare of the team. This means that people will get angry at your actions and decisions. It is an inevitable fact, if you are accountable. Having a tough skin as a leader is not an option. Getting the absolute best from your team at all times goes with the territory.

Trying to get everyone to like you is a sign of mediocrity because you will avoid the tough decisions and you will avoid confronting the people and the issues that need to be confronted. Ironically, by delaying the difficult decisions, by not standing up for your beliefs, by trying not to get anyone angry or upset and by treating everyone equally and "nicely" regardless of performance and contributions, you simply ensure that the only people you wind up angering are the most productive and unselfish people on the team.

### LESSON FOUR

Pay attention to details. When everyone on the team is busy thinking about the game and how to win, the leader must be focused and vigilant.

Successful leaders know that strategy and execution are the key to progression. All great ideas and recommendations are worthless if they can't be implemented. Good leaders empower and encourage others to take charge and make decisions but, they pay attention to details everyday because they realize that, at the end of the day they are responsible for their people and their performance.

Secondly, good leaders also understand that a high level of execution breeds success and routine thinking. This in turn brings conformity and complacency, which dulls the mind and creates laziness. Leaders that pay attention to details, continually challenge the process, the methods and the players that made them successful in the first place.

### LESSON FIVE

The good leaders are always great simplifiers, they put things in perspective and in terms that people can understand.

Effective leaders are true believers in the 'KISS' principle, Keep It Straight and Simple. They realize it is their responsibility to translate objectives and purpose into meaningful and useful information that achieves positive results. Their decisions are crisp, clear and convey an unwavering firmness and consistency. Clarity of purpose, credibility of leadership and organizational integrity is a result of simple, honest and straight forward communication.

### LESSON SIX

Good leaders are not bamboozled by the so called experts. The good leaders know that many of these self acclaimed elite experts have more theory and data than they do judgment and practical experience.

Many of the good leaders are aware that they don't have the financial resources nor the support staff that the lofty elites have. As a result, the leader is the coach, travel agent, the scheduler of games and financial support staff for some players. Just like in the real world, the leader answers the phones, drives the car, makes travel arrangements and does whatever is necessary to create corporate profitability.

Vigilant and combative, the good leader doesn't always get the opportunity to attend the conferences, seminars and symposiums that the elites do. They just make it happen on the field, in the office and out in the plant because they have credibility with the players and they know what their talking about.

### LESSON SEVEN

Be brave. Even when your not, pretend to be.

Good leaders realize that some days they are the statue, and other days they are the pigeon. It goes with the role of a coach and good leader, especially if you are in the business of building player skill, knowledge and self confidence. Good coaches know that they can't win every game and they don't. They even sometimes lose the big game.

The ripple effect of a leader's enthusiasm and optimism is contagious and so is the impact of cynicism and pessimism. The coach who whines and blames the players, the umpires, the parents and even other coaches for the loss, are not only incompetent; they're plain foolish. Leaders know that they will learn as much, if not more from a loss as they will a win. They believe in setting awesome goals and unrealistic expectations. They challenge everyone and everything around them, because perpetual optimism is a leaders multiplier.

## LESSON EIGHT

The ultimate failure of a leader is their ability to anticipate and deal with problems.

The majority of leaders would fail miserably if this were a test. Problems on softball teams are as numerous as problems in business. Problems are universal - we all have them. It is not so much the frequency or the magnitude of these problems that a leader faces but, how they elect to deal with them. Why do business leaders fail? One, they build many barriers to communication and the thought of someone in the company would approach them and talk about personal challenges are unacceptable.

Just like some softball coaches, the premise is "what have you done for me lately?" They don't want to know about your injuries, what you think about them or, what might be inhibiting your performance. To them, your just a player - go out and perform. If you can't, leave. As a result employees much like players, learn to cover up mistakes, protect their ass and only do those jobs that are absolutely necessary, and the company / team pays the price.

Real leaders make themselves available and accessible to employees. They anticipate problems and show genuine concern for the efforts and challenges faced by employees, while maintaining high standards. These leaders realize that they are much more likely to create an environment of teamwork and dedication where emphasis is on problem recognition and analysis and long term solutions replace finding fault.

## LESSON NINE

When selecting a team, look for attitude. Skills and knowledge are important but, attitude is critical. A strong attitude breeds loyalty, integrity, a high energy drive, a balanced ego, the drive to succeed, and promotes a sense of belonging and team pride.

In softball as is in business, skills and knowledge can be taught. We can train a novice in the fundamentals of the sport fairly readily if, we know the fundamentals ourselves. It's a harder task to train someone to have pride in what they do, integrity, energy, balance and the willingness to succeed. The players, much like the employees that have that positive attitude, want to be their, on the job, willing to go that extra mile and do whatever is necessary to succeed.

Good leaders put a high emphasis on attitude because they know that employees will get more altitude in life from their attitude, than they will with their aptitude.

## LESSON TEN

Leadership is lonely.

Harry Truman said it best when he said, "the buck stops here." You can encourage team play, an atmosphere of involvement and a participative approach to management and competitiveness but, ultimately the final responsibility is yours.

The essence of leadership is the willingness to make the tough decisions, the sometimes questionable choices and the preparedness to live with the outcome. Even as you create a winning team and a sound approach to leading that team, prepare to be lonely.

## About the Author

With over 40 years experience; [Canadian Mangement Centre](#) has earned the reputation as a trusted partner in worldwide [leadership development](#)

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