

FROM THE PLAYING FIELD TO THE BOARD ROOM – WHAT BUSINESS CAN LEARN FROM SPORTS

It is easy to draw parallels between the world of sport and business. Success in both fields is about performance and requires focusing on the goal, working together as a team, knowing the competition and playing to your strengths. The field of coaching, once confined to sports, is now prolific in business for the simple reason that it works, and works well. Here **Tiffany Kay** based in Warrington shares some tips from the world of sport that can help you to make the most of your business.

- *A shared vision and purpose.* The greatest sports teams always share a common goal that unites the team in pursuit of their purpose. In sport this vision is often fairly transparent – for example to win the tournament or league – however, in business defining and articulating the vision can be less easy. The vision needs to be something that the whole team are agreed upon and can get behind. The trouble with traditional business “mission statements” is that they are created by one or two of the business leaders and are not held in high regard by the employees. On a number of occasions I have visited large corporate organisations and been told by staff that there is no vision whilst they are standing in front of a plaque declaring the company mission! In a new business or small organisation, the purpose of the business is often profoundly held by the individuals who have started the business. The challenge is to maintain this as the organisation grows and expands. For every additional layer of management or supervision that is introduced, the message is likely to become more diluted, so effectively communicating the vision becomes even more important. One way of keeping the purpose at the forefront of the business activities is to have every new team member articulate their own purpose and reason for joining the organisation and use this to continually redefine the company vision.
- *Be passionate about what you offer.* The best athletes have intensive training programmes and the passion for *doing what they do* provides the motivation to consistently get out of bed early in the morning or to train beyond the limits most people set themselves. If what your company offers doesn't inspire you, it certainly won't inspire people around you. People buy people and passion is contagious. Regularly find ways to update your products so that your enthusiasm for what you do doesn't stagnate. Just as a sports person aims to represent their country, you want to employ people who are passionate about the organisation and its service/products and have a real desire to represent the company.
- *Go beyond goals* – Having goals is essential but true success is state dependent. Act as if you have already achieved your goal and notice how you would BE as a person if that was already true. The state you

access when you *imagine the achievement has already occurred* is the exact state you need to be in to perform at the highest levels. In the recent World cup rugby semi-finals you only had to look at the line up during the national anthems to know which teams were already *in the zone* and much more likely to win. England and South Africa looked solid and confident versus France and Argentina who were nervous, fidgety and overwhelmed by emotion. States are essential in leadership, selling and team working. Everything else will flow from the state you are in, and if you are ever struggling to access a resourceful state... fake it! As you begin to act “as if”, it lights up the same circuits in your neurology and the desired performance state will inevitably follow.

- *Break your goals down into smallest steps* - Breaking projects down into the smallest steps makes it much easier to achieve our goals. Often our to-do lists, written or held in our heads, contain many things that aren't really fulfilling our purpose. A good team will take any competition/challenge one game at a time, whilst remaining connected to the bigger outcome. Create goals that are directly related to the vision of the organisation and chose the next smallest step to get there. If it seems overwhelming, you know that it is too big. Try breaking it down into a smaller step and see how different that seems. You only need to choose your next smallest step. The advantage of doing things this way is it allows for new information to emerge. It is easy to get hooked into a project plan and the must, should and ought to do. By the time you complete this next step, everything may have changed and you may no longer want to do it! This way, you won't have invested energy into the whole process so it is much easier to change direction or let it go and choose something different.
- *Play to your strengths* - Understand and analyse the team members and give them the scope to play to their strengths. Profiling tools such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and Carlton DiSC Profile are excellent tools for really calculating how the team shapes up and to recognise potential areas of weakness within the organisation. It helps individuals to understand their contribution to the team and encourages collaborative working. It is also valuable for creating development plans for ongoing personal and professional development. Clarifying areas for development is useful and it builds flexibility within the team but it is also worth remembering that football teams don't put a defender in goal unless they really need to because it is not what they are trained to do!
- *Lead from the front*. The best teams perform when the leader is able to lead by example. Think of Martin Johnson and the World Cup in 2003. His power as a leader came from being able to raise his game in the face of defeat and inspire others to perform better. The leader is the one who keeps their eye on the ball and reminds the team of what is most important when under pressure. This is not to say that the leader has to be able to perform all the roles within the organisation. In fact,

the most successful leaders are those who are able to stand back and be less hands-on. This allows them to see the big picture whilst continuing to pay attention to the finer details. A 100m sprinting coach can't run as fast as the sprinter but is able to see the whole picture and has the eye to notice the difference that makes the difference.

- *Be prepared to take risks to ensure continuous improvement* – Tiger Woods seeks to continually improve his swing and will sacrifice short term winning in order to stay ahead of the game. Often his game will suffer temporary set backs whilst he works on something new. One of the issues for an organisation is the danger of becoming complacent. To be leaders in the field, means finding new ways to radically improve your offering. This always keeps you one step ahead of the competition.
- *Analyse and celebrate success* – One area that business can really learn from the field of sports is how it approaches and learns from success. Business tends to be much quicker to analyse failure and often looks to assign blame. Whilst, undoubtedly, valuable information comes from learning from mistakes, it is also important to appreciate what you are doing really well so it can be modeled and replicated. And when things are going well, remember to take time out to celebrate success.

For further information or for information on consultancy and coaching, please contact *Tiffany Kay* on **0845 833 8831** or email mail@tiffanykay.com