

## **Team Building Lessons From A World Class Coach**

How many coaches can say they have coached the side that won three world cups in a row in a sport where major powers compete, such as Japan, Canada, USA? Don Tricker, former coach of the New Zealand Black Sox Softball team, is one of New Zealand's living gems who whilst acknowledged by his colleagues at SPARC and the softball fraternity is little known in the business world. Yet I believe his methods, if applied, would take any team to glory.

I set out below some of the tips about building a 'team to win' gleaned from conversations with Don.

### **Strategy**

In Don's world strategy can be boiled down to four things:

- What are we aiming at?
- What athletes have we got? (What are our critical success factors (CSF)? what resources do we have?)
- What will the athletes need? (What do we need to do to constantly perform well in our CSFs?)
- What could bugger it all up?

We can apply this simple view to the business model (See restated points in brackets above) and I'm sure it would make strategy a lot clearer.

### **Leadership**

DT suggests that CEOs that do not share, or who are not open to change, are typically those who are underperformers. Successful CEOs want their staff to stand-up and say what they think.

DT believes that senior players do not equal leadership and in the business world how many times do we see this mistake being made? Leadership needs to run right through the team. Leadership means team members challenging the way we have done it in the past.

If we look at the recent failing in the Rugby World Cup, it could be argued that the All Blacks were conditioned not to think, with minders telling them what to wear, where to be, as well as organising their daily transportation requirements. It is important in any team who has to function well under pressure, that they are making daily decisions and thus are equipped to function well when the pressure is on.

DT further believes that it is alright to leapfrog yesterday's heroes and select young talent that has a gift for leadership.

### **Empowerment**

We need to ask ourselves, why do we want empowerment in organizations? Surely we want the group of individuals who can coach themselves. In the sporting sense, we want athletes to be the architects of what they do. Thus, this leaves the coach with the simple task of asking the right questions. A coach therefore is in the self esteem business, their tasks are to raise awareness and then transfer responsibility.

DT told me this story about his daughter.

*One day, his daughter came up to him and said, "I can't do a handstand at all. And I want to be able to do it because all my friends can".*

*DT asked her to perform a handstand, and when his daughter collapsed in a heap on the floor, he said, "Okay, lets do another one." He asked her how she felt. "It feels sucky", she replied. Without trying to understand his daughter, Don asked, "what feels sucky?" To which she replied, "My arms".*

*So Don said, "Do another one, but this time I want you to tell me, out of ten, how you rate your arms, with ten being great, and one being really sucky."*

*With his daughter concentrating on her weak point, she proceeded to do a much better handstand, whilst still collapsing on the floor. "That's a five", she said. "Lets do another one," said Don. This time, the daughter nearly completed the handstand. "Nine and a half" she exclaimed! With which she said, "I can do it" and marched off.*

Let's analyse what happened here. It is so easy as a manager / coach to refer to your own extensive knowledge and spend a lot of time talking about what you know. Instead of Don reverting to his days as a teenager and remembering all the techniques he used to use to do a handstand, he transferred responsibility and raised awareness in his daughter in what was failing her. Using her language, he got her to concentrate on this point of weakness. With the result that she left the room smiling with self belief that she did it herself.

As a manager and leader, can you shut up enough to allow your staff to tell you what they want?

### Planning for a Three Day Week

Don, over the years, has become increasingly frustrated with promising more than he can deliver. Then one day he made a simple observation. In reality you do not have five days a week to do tasks. You have three. This is because two days will always be taken up by some form of fire fighting.

He now plans all projects on the basis that full time means 3 days a week. He has found that projects now are completed on time and he has given himself space to think strategically.

### Sustained Success

In order to have sustained success, one has to have a team who respond well to change and are creative. The Canterbury franchise with Robbie Deans is a case in point.

If we look at the success of Canterbury and Robbie Deans, we see a manager who had extremely good people around him and whose tactics were easy to understand.

At the first meeting as the manager of Australia, the players gathered with baited breath to find out what complex secrets Robbie Dean had for them, that would change the way they played rugby. They expected to see a whiteboard, with more arrows than a John Wayne Western, but instead they were confronted by Robbie Deans secret. "Run towards the light." In other words play rugby where the opposition are not.

You need to continually seek answers and processes for doing old things in a new way. DT believes that you should connect practice to theory, not the other way round. In other words, in business, you need to understand the theory behind practices that are successful.

### Handling Specialists

DT points out the need to celebrate specialists and he notes that sport historically has been very good at this. Specialists, in rugby for example, will be provided their own mentors who will support them. Yet in the business world these individuals are often overloaded until they start underperforming. Instead, with these specialists, businesses should ask, "Where are we going to get the best out of Pat Carruthers" and then remove Pat from all other less important activities.

### Integrity to Honesty

Don points out that many organizations have the word *integrity* in their values and wonders whether the word *honesty* would be more appropriate.

He asks the question, as I will ask you, "When was the last time you had a conversation that caused pain?" In other words, a reprimand, a warning, or a dismissal.

The epidemic of reorganizations in New Zealand shows a total lack of integrity and honesty as in most cases, the reason for reorganization is for the removal of certain individuals. The cost of the reorganization can end up being in addition to the targeted people, talented people leave as well and the organization splutters to near standstill for six to twelve months.

In high performance sport, there are winners and losers, as in the business world. We thus need to be more honest with non-performers.

### Use your Critics

Don believes, you should find your greatest critics in your organization and get them involved in the planning brief. They obviously see the world differently and may stop you making the same mistakes you have made in the past.

### Constraints caused by old heroes

One of the constraints that DT finds in sport is self interest, especially from former players.

They are often critical of the current methods in game and say "we did it differently in our time". This trait is common in business when you have new blood in a team working in a new and challenging environment and senior managers who worked in that environment before who disagree.

### Organize a team overnight activity at an outdoor Pursuit Centre

One of DT's team building exercises was to ensure that the team went on an outdoor pursuit adventure where there were only basic accommodation amenities. He ensured there was no television as he wanted the team to always be with each other learning more about each other.

I have also met a senior partner in an accounting firm who recalled that one weekend a group of staff got together and went on a tramp. It turned out to be more of an adventure than most had anticipated. The team dynamics post the tramp were truly amazing. Those who went became known as the "A framers" and to this day they still have reunions with members flying-in from abroad.

## A Winning Coaching Style

Don's coaching style included the following:

- find out what makes each of your team members tick - this requires a number of meetings outside the work environment
- always remember that an emotional outburst may create emotional damage which takes a long time to heal
- remember selling the message to your team is important
- focus on shared leadership - be a facilitator rather than leader
- team building is vital - take your team away to out door pursuit centers
- Key tasks must be easy to understand and be able to be performed when under pressure
- ask your team members individually "What do you want from me?"
- be accepting of mistakes and analyze the decision making that lead to the mistake, both the coach and the team player will learn something.