

Game Time at Work

Book Draws Parallels Between Athletic, Business Worlds

By Tim Timmons

Comparisons between the sports and business worlds might be overused ... or they might not.

No one has to be a sports junkie to understand the simplicity in winning and losing an athletic competition. As a sports reporter a couple of decades ago, it always struck me how different and yet similar life in the office was to life on the field.

For example:

- Coaches create game plans to put their teams in position to be successful against specific opponents; in business, it's called strategic planning
- Coaches pick and choose the best players to be on the field; in business, it's hiring, firing and promotions
- Coaches work with players to get the most out of their talents; in business, people are sent to seminars and training

Opposite paths

The differences, however, are stark. Sports teams take to the field with the intention of winning. Pure, plain and simple. Too often in the workplace, people show up for work and do the same thing every day with little regard for the outcome. It's not a shocking statement to say that sometimes, some people actually try not to accomplish anything. But more than anything, athletic teams spend hours upon hours preparing for a single competition. Teams and athletes enter into that competition with their "game face" on. As Tiger Woods says, they try to bring their "A game" each time out.

In business, we've all seen examples of people who don't prepare for work – they don't spend hours upon hours honing their skills. It's also true that some people don't get their "game face" on to come to work.

All this is not to say that the work environment should become an extension of the sporting arena; a high-fiving, rah-rah environment. However, it seems to make some sense that there are lessons and parallels that can be carried over, and that's what "Coaching Success," my book released earlier this year, focuses on.

For what it's worth, there are clearly some companies out there that do an excellent job of defining the job, defining success and creating an environment in which achievements are rewarded and failures are addressed. "Coaching Success" was written to address the specific things that successful athletic teams do extraordinarily well and to show how those things translate into business.

Winning ways

It seems to start with playing to win. No team would take the field without knowing "how" to win. In most cases, a team must score more points than the other team. In business, what defines a win for a company? Whether a company employs five people or 500, how would each employee answer if asked



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that question? Would they be able to answer on a micro level as it pertains to their job? Probably. But could they answer on a macro level? Is it important that they know?

On a micro level, a swimmer knows she must have the proper technique, breathe correctly, touch the wall in a manner within the rules, etc. But on a macro level, the swimmer also knows what she must do in order for her team to compile enough points to win.

Wouldn't that sort of micro and macro knowledge benefit a company?

Accountability is the next defining difference. Accountability is not a negative word. Coaches hold players accountable all the time without it becoming a point of contention. When an athlete doesn't perform, coaches find out why. Is there some outside reason? Were they taught proper techniques? Were they trained well? If a player isn't playing to the level needed – either in a game or in practice, the coaches break down the reasons why and devise a plan to correct the problem. The coaches will spend extra time in practice or maybe after practice to work with that person.

And some companies do exactly that, but some don't. When an employee doesn't perform to acceptable standards, be active and hold them accountable. Find out why. Work with them to correct the problem. If that doesn't work, ask for help. If all that sounds like it takes too much time, think of the down time if they fail and the decreased productivity and expense of hiring someone new.

Finally, sports teams are great at improving their skills. In football, practices are held four days a week, sometimes five. Games take one day. That's a lot of practice to play just one time. At work, our "games" are every day. How much better could we be if we spent more time honing our own skills?

Ultimately, "Coaching Success" isn't designed to turn the workplace into the championship locker room. Hopefully, it just shows readers how those teams – and their companies – can get there.

INFORMATION LINK

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