



EXTRAORDINARY ORGANIZATIONS

Creating Extraordinary

Quality of Work Life, Customer Benefits, Business Results

BUILDING CHAMPIONSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

What Business Can Learn From the Sports World¹

By Don Yates

Being one of the owners of your company is unquestionably wonderful. However, it only remains so if you and your fellow owners make the enterprise a great success. That means working effectively together to produce the results that define success for you. If we look at sports, both individual and team, we find a number of factors that lead to championship playing. They are also necessary to win in the business world, but performance generally lags well behind sports on all of them. As owners it is up to you to assess your own organization to see if your performance will produce the success you want.

A Wellness Mindset

Players in both individual and team sports are constantly striving to be the very best they can physically, mentally, and competitively. In personal health many individuals are shifting their mindset from cure to prevention to *wellness*—peak health and vitality. The predominant mindset in sports is *wellness*. People in business think more in terms of curing or preventing problems than seeking *wellness*.

People Determine Results

In sports everyone agrees that players determine results. Mechanics [tools and equipment, methods, and processes] in sports are means to enhance the players' performance. The major emphasis is on increasing people capability. Business emphasizes improving mechanics to minimize the number of people and/or the capability they need.

Purpose

Sports players play for their own benefit. It may be the thrill of winning, the challenge in playing, better health, or even money—all for personal benefit. Therefore, every person is always highly motivated to do well. In business individuals are asked to “play” to benefit others—the customer, the stockholder, “the company,” “stakeholders”, and so on— but seldom themselves.

Goals and Objectives

In sports they are clear to all. Every player knows the goal of the event—a win, a top performance, a certain score—and when it is reached. They also know the intermediate objectives—first downs, where the next golf shot must land, advancing to the next round. Many in organizations are unclear about their goals and objectives, and how they are measured is often unclear.

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Roles and Responsibilities

In sports they are clear. Every player fills a particular function and knows it. When functions overlap, they know how to coordinate; for instance when the shortstop or second baseman covers second base. In business roles and responsibilities are often unclear. Many times two people claim responsibility for the same activity. Likewise many tasks go unclaimed. Unclear overlaps occur frequently.

Mutual Accountability

In team sports every player is accountable to every other player. Each succeeds only if all succeed so helping each other to perform well is a given. In business, people often focus on their own needs. In the standard hierarchical structure those below are held accountable by those above, but the reverse is not true.

Communication

In team sports communication is constant and open. Players give each other information and support all the time. In business information is often power so individuals intentionally do not communicate. In other cases they do not communicate because they do not trust others to use the information wisely. Physical separation can make communicating difficult.

Rules

Everyone plays by the same rules, and they are the same wherever a sport is played. Objective, non-involved outsiders enforce them. Business rules are not always clear, and politics often makes the rules different for different people. Enforcement can be uncertain and personal because enforcers are usually players themselves. Rules vary from company to company so players must learn new rules whenever they change games.

Role of Coaches and Leaders/Managers

Sports coaches are there to help players reach the highest level of performance possible. They are not “bosses” to whom players report. Players and coaches have different roles of equal importance. Coaches only win if the players win.

Business Leaders/Managers are primarily players carrying out “game” activities. People work “for” L/Ms rather than L/Ms being responsible for helping people reach top performance. Many L/Ms win even when their “team” loses, and more than one loss has been blamed on the “team.”

Training of Coaches and Leaders/Managers

Sports coaches have trained to be coaches. They have studied coaching and apprenticed to learn how to help players. In business most managers are promoted for being good at playing. Most have had little or no actual training in managing. Even business schools devote limited time to developing leading/managing skills and practices.

Practice Versus Playing

Players spend considerably more time practicing than playing. Even in an individual sport like golf they spend more time on the practice range than on the course. In business time spent on getting better is an expense to be controlled. There are few large people-development budgets. “Team-building” is rare and often not considered “work”. For sports teams it is a major focus of the practice time.

Where is your organization?

If you were a team competing in a tough league, would you be playing at championship level? Well, you are in a tough league. The game is called business—and **you** own the team.

The author, Don Yates, founder of Extraordinary Organizations, helps organizations have championship organizations. Whether you are starting a new team or have been in the game for a long time, he can help you, much like a sports coach. Together you will see that every one of your players is developing individually and that together they are "playing" at championship level. He can be reached at contact@extraordinaryorganizations.com and would be glad to talk with you about your situation. More information on Extraordinary Organizations is available at www.extraordinaryorganizations.com.

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