

The Leader And His Team

I firmly believe that effective leadership needs to happen in the context of a team. As I state in my book, "Leaders Who Last," (Click on the link at the end of this article to find out how to obtain your copy)

"Most of what we see today and read about speaks to the necessity of leaders being team-playing, team-building leaders. The responsibilities required to see the vision fulfilled are spread within a team. It is impossible for a leader, whether lead pastor, staff person, head of a ministry or even a small group leader, to go it alone. It is unbiblical and unwise."

In II Timothy chapter two, Paul likens the Christian experience to the world of the athlete, soldier and farmer. Over the years I have gained especially valuable insight and wisdom from the world of athletics and business. The world of the military has its valuable lessons as well. The Old and New Testament are full of stories of war, soldiers and battles. In the book of The Revelation, which sums up history, Jesus is seen as a conquering warrior with a sword coming out of His mouth. I understand where people are coming from who argue that you can't lead or coach a church, Christian organization or group like you would a business, an athletic team or a military unit, but there are most definitely key leadership principles we can learn from all three and Paul tell us so.

It is the 1st of April as I type. Spring training for both college football and professional baseball has begun, and the finals for the NCAA men's and women's basketball is a few days away. In the world of collegiate basketball, this time of year is called "March Madness." I really get interested when it is coming down to the wire with most sports. I love the finals of the NBA, and Super bowl Sunday in the NFL. I am mostly a professional football and basketball fan. However, this year I have a growing interest in how the Women's NCAA basketball playoffs are turning out. I heard Pat Summitt speak last year at a leadership broadcast with Bill Hybels (Pastor from Willow Creek in Chicago) which led me to buy her book, "Reach for the Summit."

Prior to reading "Reach for the Summit," I read "Sacred Hoops" by Phil Jackson and "Winning the NFL Way" by Bob LaMonte. Reading these books has sparked my interest in a number of areas. Among them, how a coach coaches a team, the attributes and attitudes of a good coach, and why teamwork is so critical to a winning season.

I've been tracking Pat Summitt's Lady Vols as they proceed through the play-offs. Pat Summitt has won five titles in ten years of which two were back-to-back in 1996.1997. Under her leadership over 25 years, the Tennessee Lady Volunteers (Vols) have been in the final four fourteen times (that was through 1998 when the book was written). Just last week Pat overtook Dean Smith (Michael Jordan's college basketball coach) from North Carolina as the winningest collegiate basketball coach. Pat understands leadership and how to build winning teams.

The Vols are in the final four again, as are the LSU Tigers coached by Pokey Chatman. I am hoping that these two teams, the Vols and the Tigers will meet each other in the finals on Tuesday night, April 5th. I will be watching and learning. On a trip to the San Francisco Bay Area on March 18th, I read an article about Chatman in USA Today. She is not pokey by any means. "I was a chubby little kid, so Pokey came along, and it stayed with me," Chatman says. "Probably some kids on the team don't even know my name is Dana," which she legally changed to Pokey last year.

This fiery young coach who is 35 became the head basketball coach of the LSU Tigers during the season last year (when Sue Gunter another woman's basketball coaching legend stepped down due to health issues). This is Pokey's first full season as their coach. She could be going up against the legendary Pat Summitt on Tuesday. I am hoping for that kind of match-up. It may be the passing of the baton to the next generation of younger coaches. I am fascinated in learning how coaches, and Summitt in particular, build winning teams.

Following are some quotes from “Reach for the Summit” on what makes a team successful that I have gleaned from Pat’s values and philosophy. I believe her wisdom is transferable to my role as Christian leader I mined a lot of golden principles from the river of Pat’s thoughts. I will assemble some of her ideas from the book under two headings:

1. Selecting the right people for your team
2. Clearly communicating roles and expectations

SELECTING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

“The single most common reason organizations self-destruct is disloyalty. To build a sound organization or team, you must surround yourself with people who share the same basic values; people who are constant and who will be true to your organization. I don’t care how good you are. I don’t care what kind of a genius you may be. If you don’t have good loyal people you will not succeed. I don’t know anyone who has succeeded all alone. Individual success is a myth. Teamwork is really a form of trust. It’s what happens when you surrender the mistaken idea that you can go it alone, and realize that you won’t achieve your individual goals without the support of your colleagues. If you seek out quality people and convince them to be loyal to your organization, then you will succeed, and you will eliminate a lot of trouble, mistakes and wasted energy along the way” Ask yourself if you’ve ever hired someone who was better than you. If the answer is no, go find that person and hire him or her. Now. The absolute heart of loyalty is to value those people who tell you the truth. Success in my business is about putting the right people in the right place at the right time. You can’t expect to have a successful working organization if you have the wrong people in the wrong jobs, no matter how many hours they may work”

Jim Collins, author of “Good to Great,” a book that multiplied thousands of leaders are profiting from, said that the key to success is getting the wrong people off the bus, the right people on the bus and in the right seats and then determining where the bus is going. Sue Gunther had a couple of losing seasons because she let players go who were talented but troublesome-valuing character above competence.

COMMUNICATING ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS

“For a group of people to truly become a team, there needs to be shared ownership and mutual responsibility for results The smaller and more clearly articulated someone’s job is, the easier it is to fulfill. The key is to make people accountable for their piece of the puzzle. Understanding each other’s role helps you execute. I meet four times a year with each player and spell out what her role is and what’s expected of her. If you do not clearly articulate who is responsible for what, nothing will get done. Responsibility equals accountability equals ownership. Ask yourself every day what your responsibilities are, and be accountable for them. Everybody understands the system and understands his responsibilities within the system, so that he can carry them out. A clear understanding of what’s expected of each person is crucial. People will perform so much better if they understand their specific role and what is expected from them.”

I is my prayer that these thoughts will generate some “action items” to implement for the people and teams you lead.