

MILAN

International SOCCER Academy

Rules of Successful Leadership

1. Do the simple things excellently.

It was legendary NFL coach Vince Lombardi who was quoted as saying that “excellence is achieved by the mastery of the fundamentals.” Some fifty years on, the Lombardi of his generation told us that the core principle remains the same. Sir Dave Brailsford is often quoted that the 2010 Tour de France team concentrated on the “peas rather than the steak.” To explain he told us that they spent hours focusing on all of the really clever touches (the peas) and missed really working on the basics of performance (the steak). The results were a poor, and in his words, humiliating return from the race. So many teams fail to really focus on doing the basics better than the competition. Those who do the simple things really well almost universally win the battle. This is echoed in analyzing successful teams throughout history.

2. Optimize talent with a dynamic, fun and challenging culture.

David Walsh of the Sunday Times told us that he has been fortunate to see Sir Clive Woodward’s 2003 team at close hand. He spent time with Sir Alex Ferguson’s Manchester United teams but had never seen a teamwork with the quality and professionalism anywhere in the world that he witnessed when living with Team Sky. Brailsford explained that it is “incredible what you can do with the right people” when you optimize your talent in a dynamic, challenging, fun and energetic culture. He is adamant that people create the

culture and selection is, therefore, essential to that process. Get the right people on the bus, in the words of Jim Collins in *Good to Great*, and your culture will be formed.

3. Behavioral change only comes when either the suffering or reward is great enough.

This was a key part of Brailsford's message. He is steadfast in the opinion that change can only happen from within. You can't force change on an individual, they have to drive that attitude and it will generally only come when either the suffering is great enough or the reward big enough. As with many elite performers, he is driven by the terror of losing rather than the joy of winning. In his own words, he "doesn't do losing well." Avoidance of the suffering of losing, the "humiliation and incredible embarrassment" he felt in 2010, helps him to change his behavior. In the corporate world there is a clear message when frustrated by a team member resistant to change. Discover what will make them tick, either through reward or suffering, and focus the communication on those factors.

My Master's degree final thesis in Sports Psychology centered upon the 'The 3 R's of Social Identity Theory of Leadership', so I thought I'd share some insight from the highest level of sport with regards to leadership and how coaches can implement them into their club, academy or team environment.

4. Give ownership and appeal to the mature side of the team.

Another feature of great leadership clearly espoused by Brailsford is the ownership that he gives. He talked of appealing to the mature side of his team. He does not try to tell. He continued that he "rarely likes to be told how to do things" and wouldn't react well to being shouted at. With that in mind he focuses on respect, not shouting and being ready to prompt with questions rather than preach with dictatorial commands. This clearly helps to provide the culture of trust and ownership so clearly prevalent in his teams.

5. Success can be corrosive and failure hugely motivational.

Few coaches manage to maintain their position at the summit. Brailsford has specialized in it. London followed Beijing, Froome followed Wiggins. He is a master of the monopoly. Planning for success is, in his mind, essential. The complacency that surrounds success will be explored in the brilliant performance author Rasmus Ankersen's next book "Hunger in Paradise." Too many fall away when they reach the top. Their attitude changes as they gain the trappings of success, and an arrogance is born that wasn't there as they hungered to climb their Everest. He touched on this as he spoke of the demise of England Cricket under the watch of his close friend Andy Flower. Again, reverting to the power of avoiding loss driving him, the constant restlessness is very apparent in Brailsford. Success cannot be allowed to be corrosive. Failure is not terminal but a driver to drive forward and be used as motivation to succeed.

6. People like clarity.

Role clarity and task clarity is essential. An elite team needs absolute clarity in their position. Team Sky operates with absolute clarity in vision. Clear roles, clear boundaries everyone in the team has a very clear idea of what is expected of them and what they are expected to do. With this clarity comes engagement and flow. With flow comes exceptional performance.

7. Help people to believe that they are the best.

Brailsford sees that his role as a leader is to help people believe they are the best. That belief is fundamental to success. Winning is contagious and the fire is lit by the belief that that win is possible. He works to ensure that the team believe that they have an advantage, and it is a privilege to be a member. They know they have the best training, the best kit, the best support, the best structure. When that belief is alive in the individual, winning becomes that much more attainable.

8. There is a direct correlation between salary spend and performance.

The “Performance Investment Model” is clearly an advantage that Sky’s huge investment afforded the team on tour. The same can be said with the Lottery funding for Team GB in the velodrome. Brailsford is adamant, contrary to the research done by Dan Pink in his book Drive, that there is a clear correlation that the more money you spend on salary, the greater the return in performance. He was uncompromising in his desire to bring on the best cyclists and the best leadership team. His investment in salary was returned in performance. Does this translate into the commercial world? There is a clear line of thought to suggest that the best talent secured at the highest cost will outperform those who hire cheaper alternatives. Without vision, purpose and direction however, the results will be far from inevitable.

9. The greatest marginal gain is a simple smile.

If you are a small start-up with limited financial resource or the richest investment bank on the planet, one of the best marginal gains that you can give your team is a simple smile ... “and it doesn’t cost a penny!” Brailsford believes that when you are under pressure a smile from a colleague asking “are you okay and what can I do to help” can mean as much as any significant investment. Playing the game with poise and a smile on your face can make all the difference.

10. If you want people to perform, make them feel valued.

If Sir Dave Brailsford were ever to return to the corporate world (he spent time as a management consultant some years ago) the one biggest bit of advice that he would give is to make people feel valued. Performance hinges on people feeling genuinely valued in an organization. This is clearly a subject area of real importance and significance to him. Intrinsic engagement can only truly exist if the team feel valued and have an ability to influence the group. Again,

this is absolutely a critical feature of the groups that he has been associated with.

11. Make sure you hire the very best.

Team GB and Team Sky shared the standout fact that, under the charge of their performance director, they hired the very best in their field. From psychologist Dr Steve Peters (whom he described as his most important hire) through to Wiggins himself, he is uncompromising in his drive to hire no-one but the very best. As compromises are made in the quality of those brought into the organization, so too does performance dip. Jack Welch has famously been quoted as saying you must “hire people better than yourself.” Some tasks for Brailsford but one he is committed to.

16. Build the right culture to get 30% more.

Brailsford believes that the same person can perform at a minimum of 30% better in one environment than they would in another purely down to the culture. With that in mind, he sees it as essential to strive to build the right culture in a team to ensure every member is given the maximum opportunity to flourish.

17. Be massively driven to improve.

Another feature of all of the elite performers and world class leaders that we have studied is the constant desire to learn and improve. In his early twenties, having left school at 16 wholly uninterested in school, Brailsford found an obsession with reading about what made people exceptional. His thirst for knowledge saw him devour book after book in his quest to understand how to win. You see the same habit echoed by the exceptional England Rugby head coach Stuart Lancaster in particular, who Brailsford joins in the P8 Summit of elite coaches including Mike Forde, Arsene Wenger, Andy Flower and Steve

McLaren. All share that hunger to learn. This can be directly linked to some of the great leaders in business who share that restlessness and desire to constantly educate and improve.

18. Winning is contagious.

To quote Lombardi again “winning is a habit.” You need to learn to win and absolutely believe that you are going to do so in Brailsford’s eyes. Building a winning culture requires a team who believe that they are going to win and that comes from a conveyor belt of success. Once that momentum is building, it can be very difficult to de-rail.

19. The team should create the rules.

Brailsford is not alone in saying that the team should create the rules to gain maximum buy in and engagement. There are clear team rules that are pinned up in the famous Team Sky bus. Those rules were co-invented by the riders. This is a philosophy that consistently springs up when reading about successful teams. Clive Woodward championed the “team-ship rules” written and upheld by the winning 2003 rugby team. He continued this with clear, team led rules in the work he did with Team GB in London 2012. Relating back to his desire to give ownership to the team, this is a clear example of how great leaders will involve the team in decisions to create environments of trust and accountability.

20. Vision leads to understanding

The final piece of the jigsaw is the creation of a clear, compelling vision. When you talk to experts in elite performance, people who have absolutely performed and worked at the peak, the common theme of that team is the powerful vision of where it wants to be. vision is starting point for team or businesses success.