

## J. Michael Locke

### Musings

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#### #10: Leader as Coach

##### April 1, 2020

I will never forget my first memo as a CEO. My mentor Bob King returned the draft with one change over and over again – crossing out “I” and putting in “we.” He said “I never want to hear you say I again, you don’t do anything, the team does it.”

There has never been a more critical time to have a great team. As a CEO, building that team is your #1 job. You are not a player on the field, you are the coach on the sidelines. Your job is to identify, attract, grow and retain talent. Your job is to figure out who should play what position. When interviewing folks, I often go to the whiteboard and draw the standard triangle org chart with CEO on top but then flip it and put CEO at bottom. IMO, the job is to create an environment for your “team members” (never use the word subordinate) to excel and they in turn to do the same so the person at the “bottom” of the org chart is the person at the “top” of the value creation pyramid. They are the ones interacting with the customer on the phone, in the store, on the campus or in today’s world, on zoom.

Successful coaches are great leaders. For real football fans, Sir Alec Ferguson is a hero (record setting manager of Manchester United). Sir Alec has written a good book on leadership that’s worth a read ( <https://www.amazon.com/Leading-Learning-Years-Manchester-United/dp/0316268100> ). His keys to leadership were laid out in an October 2013 HBR article <https://hbr.org/2013/10/fergusons-formula> ):

1. Start with the foundation: Invest in young talent and inspire them to be better
2. Set High Standards – and hold everyone to them: Everyone seeking to do better
3. Encourage as much as possible but be candid about shortfalls
4. Rely on the power of observation
5. Never stop adapting

As to #2, it can become cultural. Many of my colleagues know TIGBINTY. Someone would preface a presentation of results by saying “***This is good but it’s not there yet***” as they knew the follow-up questions would be about how to improve and be even better.

Personally, I recommend you spend an extraordinary amount of time “selling” employment at your organizations. Talented professionals are scarce (even in the future 20% unemployment world). They have choices. Why should they work with you? I always share with prospective team members that interviews are “match making” exercises and not “selection” exercises. Is the organization and its culture the right place for the individual to grow, develop and excel? If you can develop a “learning mindset” where every individual is trying to get better every day, the whole organization becomes a learning “organism” which will grow and excel. Almost like organizational AI.

A last few thoughts. The CHRO must report to the CEO and not the CFO. Second, hire competitive, ambitious people. I believe in hiring “people” rather than a robot-like set of competencies. What is

their life story? Have they shown ambition? Personally, I am a big fan of hiring athletes especially of dynamic team sports. The midfielder in soccer doesn't necessarily score a lot, but they must understand the field, the opposition, their teammates position and constantly adjust (no parental bias due to our DePauw midfielder Skip). Isn't that what you have to do in today's business world?

Be Safe. As they said in the movie The Blind Side (we are all watching a lot of movies right now), "the team is your family Michael....are you going to protect your family?" No different in a business.