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Coaching for Teamwork

by Vincent H. Lombardi

Problem or Challenge?

Farm income is dropping, problem loans are rising, rural America continues to shrink ... problem or challenge?

No matter what your particular mindset, problem or challenge, all can agree that the near term for the farm economy is uncertain. As an agricultural banker, how do you respond? "Times are difficult, I need to be tougher and assume control!" or "As a leader, how do I motivate my people to be more accountable and creative?"

If it's the latter response then Coaching for Teamwork deserves your attention. Your people, your most important asset, are poised to help you turn this challenging period into the opportunity to emerge from these difficult times positioned to take full advantage of the next agricultural upturn.



Vince Lombardi, son of the late football coach Vincent T. Lombardi, presents seminars and workshops on "High Performance People," "The Negotiation Game" and "Coaching For Teamwork".

If you are a business owner, manager or organizational leader looking to develop a loyal, productive and energetic team committed to success in the 90s, then you must understand the key to that success – coaching for teamwork.

More and more, we are asking the people who work for us and with us to become entrepreneurial, to manage their own work. The result is that management functions are being pushed further and further down the organizational structure. As a consequence, people at the top must be more coach than manager or leader.

When times are difficult, managers and leaders tend to take matters into their own hands. They proceed on the premise that they alone are responsible for the success of the organization. Yet this attitude runs counter to everything we are learning today. Top down management is inefficient, a one-way information flow down the organizational chart is unresponsive to the demands in the workplace of the 90s.

Coaches, on the other hand, know they can't play the game. They belong on the sideline. Only the players can actually compete and win the game. Therefore, coaches know that their No. 1 priority is to provide an environment and an atmosphere in which their people have the greatest opportunity to win.

Vision is Vital

Good coaches have a clear, precise vision of what they want for their team. This picture of excellence, this vision, is the essence of coaching. This is my opinion from studying and observing an outstanding coach, my father.

It is generally conceded that Vince Lombardi was one of the great coaches of the modern football era. Yet Vince Lombardi waited until he was 47 years old to become a head coach. In those years prior to being hired to coach the Green Bay Packers, Lombardi formulated a clear and precise vision of how to transform a losing team into a champion.

My father went to Green Bay in 1959, in 1960 the Packers played for the World Championship. They lost that game, but

they never lost another championship game. In the next seven years they won five world championships, three in a row, including the first two Super Bowls. This championship record is clear, convincing testimony to the importance of having a vision, the coaches' picture of excellence.

If vision is the essence of being a coach, then mental toughness is the one quality a coach must possess. Vision without mental toughness is nothing more than a good idea. For a coach, mental toughness is holding on to that picture of excellence you have for your team when everyone around you is saying, "Who are you to think you can do that, no one like you has ever done that before."

Good coaches have a clear, precise vision of what they want for their team.

Mental toughness, like all leadership qualities is learned. It isn't inherent, we aren't born with it or without it, it doesn't just happen. During the 1988 Winter Olympics, one of the first events was the pairs skating. The Russians were favored to win. The Russian girl was 16 years old and weighed 84 pounds. Her vision was to win the gold. The odds, or current reality were against her – she was so young, so small, she could fall down, the competition was so intense! The Russians won the gold medal. Mental toughness can come in a 16-year-old, 84-pound package. You don't have to be a hulking middle line-backer to be tough.

The Art of Motivation

As a coach, Vince Lombardi was a consummate motivator. He understood that there are basically two kinds of motivation: restrictive and constructive. Restrictive motivation is "I have to do it or else." I have to do it or else I will be punished, ridiculed or embarrassed. "Do it or else",

is a good way to motivate short-term. And my father was a master.

Many times with his players it was "my way or the highway" or, "If you can't get the job done I'll find someone who can." They tell the story of the sportswriter interviewing some Packer players and asking, "What is it about Coach Lombardi that makes you so successful?" One of the players thought for a moment and replied, "He treats us all alike, he treats us all the same – like dogs."

Lombardi knew, however, that restrictive motivation was not lasting motivation. So after he gained the players attention with "do it or else", he would switch to constructive motivation. Constructive motivation is focussing on the pay value, the personal profitability in completing a job successfully. All good coaches paint great pictures of the rewards that come from winning. When the team can see the pay value, the benefit that comes from winning, it's no longer "I have to" rather, "I want to", "I choose to", "I like it", "I love it", "This is my idea."

An example of Lombardi's style of constructive motivation involved Jerry Kramer, an All-Pro guard for many years. Jerry was sitting in front of his locker after an especially poor practice wondering if it was time to move on to a different occupation. My father walked by, sized up the situation, tousled Jerry's hair and told him, "Son, someday you're going to be one of the greatest guards in football." Jerry Kramer never had to be pushed again. He recently was named to the all-time Super Bowl team.

Vince Lombardi's teams were not a loose collection of individuals. The whole was bigger than the sum of the parts on the Green Bay Packers. They had synergy. One plus one didn't equal two. Rather, one plus one equaled four, eight, 16! Lombardi's teams had trust for one another, they respected one another and they were committed to one another.

You respect your teammates, so you do what you say you will do. You trust your teammates, so you know they will do what they say they will do. You are committed to each other.

Commitment

Commitment? One of my fathers' better-known quotes is, "The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence". What does true commitment entail?

Sun Tzu an ancient Chinese general wrote the *Art of War* centuries ago. One of the book's principles is that if you have your enemy cornered, leave him a way out. Otherwise he will fight to the death and you will get more than you bargained for. Commitment is leaving yourself no way out. Commitment is, figuratively at least, being willing to fight to the death for what you have committed to.

Cus D'Amato, a well-known fight manager, once had a fighter in training for a number of months. A sportswriter asked Cus if his fighter was ready. Cus said, "Oh, about 90%". The writer remarked that the fighter had been in training for months, why wasn't he ready? Cus replied that he didn't believe a fighter ever entered the ring thinking he was a 100% ready. Because if he did and lost he would never get in the ring again. Like fighters, teams have a tendency to hold back on their commitments, they pursue their vision at about 90%, so that if they get beat they have an excuse and they can rationalize the loss. Commitment is giving 100%. Commitment is, figuratively at

least, being willing to fight to the death for what the team has committed to.

What follows when a coach creates trust, respect and commitment within the organization? A winning attitude! When the Green Bay Packers stepped on the field, they didn't hope to win, they expected to win! In their minds they never lost a game, once in a while they just ran out of time.

A Winning Attitude

There is a corollary to this winning attitude. Good coaches transform this winning attitude into a winning tradition. When new people join the team, the veterans, the old hands, pass the winning attitude on to the new arrivals. "This is how we do things." "Around here we expect to win." With a winning tradition, you don't succeed just this year, you don't win once in awhile. With a winning tradition, you win time after time, year after year after year.

Coaches, projecting that precise picture of excellence they have for their team, embodying the quality of mental toughness, and motivating constructively, build within their people trust, respect and commitment. The result is a winning tradition, where the team doesn't simply attain their goals, they maintain their goals – the real payoff from coaching for teamwork. ▲