

The Leadership of a High Performance Sport Development Staff

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In a service profession, such as the field of strength and conditioning, in the management of the athlete as well as the administration of the high performance sport development staff, servant leadership is necessary to effectively motivate performance through the wearisome day to day work load, which is of utmost importance for executing short term tasks, mid-range goals and in long-term mission completion. Dierendonck (2011), describes servant leadership as displayed in the empowerment and the development of people, conveyed by authentically providing direction, demonstrating stewardship with the act of taking care of your staff and the organization, by being humble with the understanding that no work within the organization is beneath you, and through interpersonal acceptance, established by taking ownership of anything that will eventually go wrong. A servant leader understands there is reciprocity in the strong affiliation with individuals within the organization and builds the relationship through trust and fairness.

Looking deeper into what can aid the high performance director in guiding both the staff and the high performance athletes, one can apply what has been observed in the leadership sciences. Since the beginning of time there have been leaders and followers. From the onset of this relationship, people have been trying to better understand the forces involved in establishing power and control. Regardless of what organization, group, assembly, or collection of individuals with a common cause, there is always a hierarchical structure that forms either formally or informally. How does a leader acquire power? The answer to this question has been mulled over time, researched and studied both properly and casually, and is one of the most coveted and important answers in human history.

Where does power come from? Are leaders born or are they made? According to Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber (2009), when studying both identical and

fraternal twins, only 30% of leadership characteristics and abilities are found to be from genetic make-up, whereas the remaining 70% of their abilities seem to stem from the individuals environmental influences and their surroundings.

This is an interesting finding because it validates the United States Military Academy at West Point's philosophy that leaders are not born, but made. They adhere to a time tested system of leader development that brings a cadet through a multi-faceted approach through stages that transform an individual's mindset and aid the student in appropriate decision making in their future. (Leader to Leader Institute, 2007)

How than is power for leadership obtained to set up the Leader-Follower-Situational Framework? This is a very complicated and layered answer. According to both the Leader to Leader Institute (2007), paralleled by the work done by Avolio et al. (2009), there are common denominators that afford a leader the ability to exert power and have control over followers within a situation. We know from the Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (2012) text that perceived power can be gained by certain physical characteristics, such as uniform, choice of clothing, posture, etc. Rank and perceived knowledge creates automatic situations of power. Reputation, connections and relationships also can put individuals in a stronger role within a group. Another source of power lies within an individual's governance over desired resources as well as the ability to reprimand, demote, or eliminate positions and assets. Although the previously mentioned attributes and elements can place an individual in a position of power, it is more important what one does in that position of power. Likewise, what one does in that position of power ultimately affects one's ability to lead and the follower's capacity to follow. A very interesting study done by Phillips and Bedeian (1994) looks into the exchange quality of the leader and the follower, discovering the

quality of the exchanges between the leader and the follower directly affect the output and productivity of the follower. The followers in their study were a sample of registered nurses, while the leaders were represented by the nurse supervisors in hospital settings. This study is attention-grabbing due to the fact that a hospital setting is typically a high stress, emotionally charged environment, where life and death decision making takes place on a daily basis. The study found that exchanges in which the leader genuinely is learning about the follower, where the leader sincerely is concerned with the follower's development, helped to bring the follower through more challenging situations.

So, in essence, the question shifts to when one has power, how does one make sure that one can use power correctly and ensure a quality environment for followers? Again, looking at work done by the LLI (2007), it is important to understand that in order to be a good leader, one must be a good follower. A leader should always remember what it is like to be a follower and never remove themselves completely from that role. With this in mind, a very interesting study done in 2003 of the 101st Airborne. The study showed that compliance based on a leader's position only will work in low risk environments. The study found that obedience really will only exist due to the leader's ability to deliver rewards and punishments in situations where observation can occur. In order to transcend this basic reward vs punishment motivation, soldiers needed one key characteristic out of their leader. That characteristic is trust. The 2003 study went so far as to identify the top ten attributes required of a leader to possess in order for soldiers to comply during high risk circumstances. These characteristics are: competence (technically and tactically), loyalty toward the soldiers (placing the welfare of their subordinates over their own), a leader of integrity (being able to believe the information from the leader), leading by example (sharing hardships and creating a sense of "we are all in this together"), having self-control (to be able to maintain composure in high stress situations), a leader with confidence (having the ability to relay sound and timely decisions), a leader who is courageous (having the moral strength to do the right thing regardless of what this means to a leader's career), a leader who shares information (followers want to be able to plan and anticipate, preparing for the future, so good information flow is desired), a leader having a personal connection with a follower (followers trust a leader who will make an effort to learn about them as well as understand what their needs are), and a strong sense of duty (followers

want to know that their leader is committed to the mission, that they all in).

It is important to look at these attributes of trust discovered in the 2003 study. Looking at leadership from the perspective of the follower will only allow a leader to reflect more accurately on how he or she is leading. The 2003, 101st Airborne study, creates a template for grading a leader in his or her ability to lead and their ability to influence. By understanding these attributes, one can see the importance of developing the leadership skills discussed by Hughes et al. (2012).

By analyzing information gathered from both the study of hospital nurses and of airborne soldiers, as well as reading from the text, a thought-provoking formula can be deduced:

Competence + Caring + Cooperation = Compliance

If the leader is good at what they do, and the leader genuinely cares about his/her followers, while having an encouraging cooperative relationship with his/her followers, the leader will have compliance of the group, hence power will be obtained.

Based on the information, it starts with competence. Regardless of whether you are a leader or a follower, you have to start by being competent in what you do. People respect individuals who are talented at their job, whatever job that may be. Continual honing of technical and tactical skills is a must. Whether you are a soldier, a nurse, or any professional in between; caring matters. Leaders who are loyal, look out for your interest, and work to develop you as a better professional and human being, gain your trust. Finally, followers want to be involved. They want input and they want honest information. When the leader and follower work as a team, a great level of held interest is encountered by both parties, securing the framework for compliance and in effect giving power to both the leader and the follower in any situation.

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