

IS YOUR BUSINESS FINALS READY? BUSINESS LESSONS YOU CAN LEARN FROM A PROFESSIONAL SPORTS COACH

MELBOURNE BUSINESSMAN AND AVID SPORTS FAN KIRK PETERSON HAS SPENT THE BULK OF HIS LIFE COACHING AND COMPETING IN HIGH PERFORMING SPORTS TEAMS. AS A SMALL BUSINESS OWNER, PETERSON HAS SEEN FIRST-HAND HOW THE BASIC PHILOSOPHIES AND KEY FUNDAMENTALS THAT ARE DRILLED INTO SUCCESSFUL PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES CAN ALSO BE APPLIED IN THE BUSINESS WORLD. WITH FOOTY FINALS FEVER IN BOTH CODES IN FULL SWING THIS MONTH, HERE PETERSON EXPLAINS WHAT SME BUSINESS OWNERS CAN LEARN FROM PROFESSIONAL SPORTS COACHES TO BUILD A BETTER, STRONGER TEAM - ONE FILLED WITH TEAM MEMBERS THAT AIM FOR 'EXCEPTIONAL' RATHER THAN SETTling FOR MERELY 'GOOD'.

Business would be easy - if it weren't for other people. The challenges surrounding people management are a real part of every business owner's daily struggle. If you are constantly asking yourself, "How do I keep my team engaged and on board?", then I invite you reconsider the way you manage your people. Throughout my years in business, it has astonished me how unaccountable grown adults can be for their own actions. Time and time again I come across cultures of negativity, defensiveness and finger pointing. There was a complete lack of responsibility and accountability for their own actions; instead, they would expend their energy on finding someone else to blame.

I quickly realised the greatest challenge I would face in order for my own business to succeed would be people management. And

I can tell you, it wasn't easy - I had a full head of hair before I started managing people!

In order to get the most out of my people, I realised I had to draw on my experiences from the sporting world. I identified that there are numerous qualities that are indoctrinated into athletes when they are part of a high performing sports team that easily translate into business, so I approached managing my people like a game of football. What follows here is a breakdown and examination of that process, to explain how you can apply it in your business.

PRE SEASON: THE DRAFT PICK

This is by far the most crucial stage of the process. You need to ensure you pick the most suitable people for your organisation and culture.

A well-known business model is the Skill vs Will vs Fit model, which highlights the importance of a candidate's skillset versus their willingness to learn and cultural fit for the organisation. Too many times I see people who are not experienced in selecting the right people performing the role of recruitment within organisations, without any anecdotal data to assist them.

Decisions within this crucial stage are often based on a person's skillset, experience or how likeable they are. In my opinion, skills and experience can be taught, but a person's hardwiring, attitude and outlook on life is much harder to change.

An additional business model is the 3 P's of business - People, Product & Processes. In my experience, the product and processes are usually reasonably good, however the



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challenges lie in having the right people on board from the outset. It astonishes me how little effort and investment some organisations put into the recruitment process. In my opinion, this is where you need to get it right; in fact, this is where you categorically can't afford to keep getting it wrong.

By utilising qualified assessments in the recruitment stage, you are able to see deeper into the person, allowing you to understand how they are hardwired and how well they will really 'fit' into your organisation. Assessments should never be treated as the panacea, but instead used as a useful tool for providing you with substantial independent advice in order to assist in the decision making process.

Now that you have the right people on the team, you need to focus on the first six rounds of the season.

ROUND ONE: NAILING THE INDUCTION PROCESS

First impressions count, and if there is no structure to your induction process or it is a stage that is glossed over with no real thought or effort, you run the risk of your new employees developing a negative impression and starting off in the wrong frame of mind.

Too often I see a cookie cutter approach to the induction process where new employees are shuffled from one office to another to hear someone drone on about their role, which most of the time has little or no relevance to the poor person having to sit through hours and hours of useless information. Everyone absorbs information differently (Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic) so taking the time to understand the best way for each new starter to learn and tailoring their induction to their

personal style will ensure they get the most out of the induction stage.

The default approach to learning for an AFL team is to learn the theory behind something, and then practically perform it over and over and over again. This activates the most important learning style – kinaesthetic. They run drill after drill to ensure they unconsciously understand the concept of the strategy, which allows them to instinctively react correctly to certain situations even when under pressure.

In the workforce, we tend to take a different approach and just keep barking orders in the same learning style, louder and more frequently. And when we find this is not effective, we think that the individuals are not capable and competent, when it's the inflexibility of our communication that

is creating the constraints. By taking some time to really consider the best way to induct each individual role and then tailoring that induction process to the individual's learning style, you will ensure your newest team member is given the best opportunity to gain all the relevant information they need to succeed in their new role.

ROUND TWO: DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Training is essential for any high performing sports team, and it should be no different in business. After setting the right tone during the induction process, you need to continue to focus on their continual improvement and growth.

In business today, managers are too busy to focus on additional training for their staff outside of the basic training they require to perform their role.

Training and team building is essential for your people to ensure they continue to develop, feel valued and create a sense of community amongst other team members. By strengthening relationships, building trust and developing your people you ensure they do not get complacent and become disengaged. For too long organisations have taken a "one size fits all" approach to training, resulting in poor results and wasted investment. We can't possibly understand the innate strengths and weaknesses of the people we are managing unless we take the time to really investigate them.

Using the data collected during the assessment stage of the recruitment process, you are able to understand their hard wiring and how this directly impacts on job performance, development and overall culture. It allows you to make an informed decision surrounding the best possible training program for each individual to ensure you get the most out of each and every employee.

Research shows the most effective lasting results come from a long term training approach. This is based on the fundamental principle of teach a bit and then embed the transformational behaviour until new ingrained habits are created. The new habits allow an increase in performance, but more importantly create sustainability.

ROUND THREE: CREATE CORPORATE ATHLETES WITH LEADERSHIP THROUGH SELF-MANAGEMENT

Employees need to start taking responsibility for their own actions and stop relying the boss to fix their problems. Every individual has the ability to choose how they react to any given situation, and it is these choices that determine the culture of the organisation.

AFL players don't settle for good, they strive for exceptional. It is not enough to make the finals, they want to take out the grand final. As business owners and managers, we need to encourage our people to look at every day with the same attitude, understand their personal drivers and want to be better. We are all confronted with hundreds of decisions every day and we have a choice as to whether we choose to remain average or we strive to be exceptional.

Every outcome is created by a process. I see a lot of organisations trying to change their outcomes by doing the same thing and expecting a different result. We need to look at the process from start to finish and focus our energy on changing factors that are within our control instead of harbouring on those areas that are outside of our control. We need to put the responsibility back on our people and empower them to manage their own destiny.

If you are developing a team of self-managed individuals, you are unlikely to create a culture where people are negative, defensive, constantly blaming others and

pointing the finger. Instead, your people will take responsibility and accountability for their own actions and choices and encourage their colleagues to do the same. They will choose 'exceptional' over merely 'good' every day of the week.

I love the correlation between sport and business in this space and in my opinion athletes are experts in the field of self-management. They know their intrinsic and extrinsic motivators intimately and understand how to get the most out of themselves and release their untapped potential. They recognise that their success rests entirely on their own shoulders. There are endless qualities instilled into elite athletes that translate into the day-to-day operations of any organisation. Some of the fundamental ones, which we'll call the 'Five Traits of a Corporate Athlete', include:

1. **Self-Awareness:** The ability to get the most out of yourself by intimately understanding your own key drivers, strengths, blockages and challenges.
2. **Confrontational:** The ability to address any situation with manners, professionalism and clarity, regardless of fear of offence or negative reactions.
3. **Dedicated:** Focused and loyal, they never take their eye off the main objective or waiver off course.
4. **Positive:** The ability to focus on the positive in every situation, no matter how challenging and block out negative internal thoughts.
5. **Self-Managed:** Accountable and take responsibility for their own actions, they are self-motivating and know how to manage themselves effectively.

Most organisations lack the principles and processes required to achieve a high performing team. Too often business owners take too much responsibility for their employees, instead of encouraging them to take ownership of their own challenges and guiding them through the best way to manage them.



(AFL Photos)

ROUND FOUR: DEVELOP A SOLUTION-CENTRIC CULTURE

People create culture and if your people are not engaged, negativity will creep in and your culture will ultimately suffer. A winning culture is an essential ingredient for the success of any sporting team. Without a solid culture and strong team cohesion, the team will never reach the peak of their success. They must work as one, towards one goal in order to achieve their objectives. While this may come more naturally to sporting teams, businesses also need to focus on creating a solution centric, positive culture in order to

achieve success.

Employees need to feel part of a culture that they have created. Today's workplace is a very different environment than what it has been in years gone by. People have evolved. They are more driven, assertive and constantly needing to feel like they are contributing and providing value to the business.

Your people need to feel engaged and invested in their role in order for you to get the most out of them. Despite an obvious shift in people's professional needs, we are still using yesterday's management skills for tomorrow's people challenges.

Confrontation may be a dirty word to some people, but I believe positive confrontation is essential for any good culture. Employees should be encouraged to address their colleagues if they feel they are not adding value to the culture. This puts the onus back on the employees to "see something and say something". We need to empower people to challenge the status quo and settle for nothing less than exceptional. If this message is not only coming from management but also from colleagues, your people will have no choice but to "shape up or ship out".



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In order to achieve real success, each team member needs to give 100 per cent effort, 100 per cent of the time. Without this, those team members who are performing may feel resentment and it makes it impossible to monitor the success of the game plan if some people are not performing. As a group, organisations need to identify the values and trademark behaviours that they feel should be a part of their culture and then ensure each and every person is living these on a daily basis.

ROUND FIVE: ALIGNMENT - CREATE A GAME PLAN/VISION AND GAIN BUY IN
Just like any sporting team, organisations need to create their game plan and ensure that everyone on the team knows the plan and understands it. True success is achieved not only when employees are accountable for

their actions and responsibilities, but when all divisions of the business are speaking the same language and aligned towards the same clear strategic vision. I often see silos created within organisations with different departments working towards different goals and objectives.

In today's world it is very easy for business owners to get caught up in the day to day running of the business and become "busy" with operational tasks that do not impact on the long-term strategic goals of the organisation. So how do you get your employees to buy into your vision? By allowing them the opportunity to a part of determining the objectives for the business, you are immediately creating buy-in and ensuring maximum engagement amongst the people that will ultimately be responsible for achieving those objectives.

Once clear accountabilities have been agreed upon, ensure a consistent message is communicated throughout the organisation, creating buy in all the way down the line. With all levels of your organisation working towards the same set of objectives, this guarantees that all staff are 100 per cent aligned and focused on the same end goal. This then provides the framework for total alignment throughout any organisation and helps managers understand the difference between accountability versus responsibility, encouraging delegation and in turn empowering more employees with a sounder understanding of the business operations.

As you can see from the above diagram, the most important traits in any team are trust and feedback. And the trust starts from the leader and filters downwards.

ROUND SIX: CONSTANT REVIEW AND REFLECTION

At the end of each quarter of football, the coach and his staff head straight out onto the ground to address their team. They facilitate immediate communication and feedback focusing on what the team has done well, what they can do better, and adjusting the plan for the rest of the game. While most organisations have an annual plan, where they fall down is through a lack of review and reflection.

In business, the goal posts are constantly changing which makes regular reviews and revisions essential for any organisation. Regular communication and scheduled reviews should take place throughout the entire organisation, all the way down the line from managers meeting with employee's weekly or monthly to review progress, through to business owners/boards reviewing outcomes, processes, culture and behaviours at the end of each quarter and adjusting the plan to ensure the annual objectives remain achievable.

Reflection is essential for continuous improvement and forms a fundamental part of the Kaizen model, which is a philosophy I have personally used throughout my career. "Kaizen" means "improvement", or, more precisely, "continuous improvement",

involving everyone in the organisation from top management, to managers, then to supervisors, and to workers. Kaizen is a Japanese philosophy for process improvement that can be traced back to the meaning of the Japanese words "Kai" and "Zen", which translate roughly into, "to break apart and investigate" and "to improve upon the existing situation". It is a philosophy of never being satisfied with what was accomplished last week or last year.

It is important that all meetings and reviews are structured with a clear agenda that identifies the objectives and desired outcome for the meeting to ensure they are effective and efficient. AFL clubs tend to do this very well and have concise and precise objectives for each meeting, with everyone involved walking away with a plan and outcome. In business, however, we tend to have meetings for meetings sake, listen to the biggest ego in the room and often leave the room no clearer than when we walked in. We are always complaining we are too busy, so try focusing on making meetings more concise with a clear agenda and desired outcome. This will keep the group focused on the task at hand and achieve time efficiencies, allowing everyone to prioritise more important tasks.

There is a lot that businesses can learn from successful sporting teams and elite athletes, and by translating their key principles into everyday business and doing things a bit differently, you may just discover the perfect game plan for you and your team. We are now approaching the end of the first quarter of the 2014/2015 season – what a great opportunity to stop, reflect and create an effective game plan for the next three quarters of the game. Game on!



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