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INTRODUCTION

Peter Drucker said that culture eats strategy for breakfast. If this is true, we would like to add that a team takes a group's lunch every time and close-knit teams create bonds that last a lifetime.

Over the last 40 years we have been participants, leaders, and coaches on countless teams. Most of them have not won the championship and many have been ones where the end of the season couldn't come soon enough. Yet, there were a few where the relationships gelled, the competition was fierce, and we prevailed with a title.

This white paper is a review of the elements that we noticed go into the making of a close-knit team. Being connected to other likeminded people tied to a common cause feels fantastic. The more meaningful shared experiences a group can have the better the chances they will become a close-knit team with an attitude, and a way of behaving that makes them unique and improves their chances of success.

Our aim in authoring this book is to help an individual contributor be a better teammate, to help a frontline manager build a cohesive small team, and to help the executive leader pull together a series of small teams into a larger team to accomplish a big hairy audacious goal.

We have broken the nine essential elements into three groups and have marked each group with a color:



The green group focuses on communicating and defining the language that will be used on this team.



The blue group is about connection, helping people belong helping build team chemistry and using ceremony to memorialize the commitments are key elements to building a close-knit human system.



The red group is the fire room. With big goals comes big competition, to rise above the competition, the team will need to test itself. Challenging the team with highly adaptive tests and allowing the team to work at full speed is critical if you want to create the type of championship performance that wins the title.

While we have organized the elements to fit the chronology of a season, feel free to move them around as you see fit with your team.



Essential Element #1 Non-Correlated Game Playing

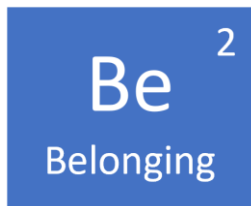
A fresh start with people who don't know each other can be awkward. The power and influence dynamics are often unsettled and as the leader you want to help things start on the right path. Forcing others to listen to you talk is a trap. We suggest creating a social atmosphere where a series of games are played. These games can range from Bananagrams to Pictionary or from basketball to video games. The key is to allow your individual contributors a chance to have fun shared experiences so they can start to get comfortable with each other.

In the recent Top Gun Maverick movie there was a great example of this with the pilots playing two-way beach tackle football. In this case it was to let off steam, but it still served the purpose of helping everyone come together. Whatever the main goal is and regardless of how disparate the skill sets required, humans perform better when they feel connected to the others that are committed to a common cause.

As you kick off your season find a way to get everyone together away from the game. If you're a basketball team don't meet at a gym and if you're a swim team don't meet at the pool. Once you have everybody assembled, create a calm, happy atmosphere where everyone can get to know each other, and start to play some small games to let everyone start to feel each other out. The calm social setting will allow your players to start to size each other up and have some fun showing off what they can do, but in a way that is not-threatening.

There will be plenty of time for everyone to need to be quiet and listen to your voice and there will be plenty of opportunities for others to speak as well. Your aim in this first setting is to allow the others to talk, listen, and to help them feel comfortable and get excited about their pending joint quest.





Essential Element #2

What is Whakapapa and Why Should You Care About it?

At the beginning of the season when people can be uncertain with their roles or responsibilities, helping everyone feel like they belong is crucial. Modern teams in business and in sport can be a combination of diverse backgrounds and points of view. Social technologies and aggressive media outlets have been undermining our ability to trust people who may appear different than us. Creating a safe space for each member of the team to bring a piece of their culture and share it with the others allows you to create common sense of belonging on this team at this moment.

We have found no better example of this than in the Maori term Whakapapa. Whakapapa has several meanings, the first being how a person is connected to the Maori lineage and all things in the world, in short, their genealogy.

An additional meaning that might be relevant for you and your teams today is a **"deep connection to land and the roots of one's ancestry."**

The words "deep connection" and "ancestry" are of particular interest at the beginning of a season because these words and the correlating emotions can lead to a strong sense of collective trust. It is our view that teams only move as fast as their collective trust will allow them. We have shortened this concept up over the years into the phrase **"teams move at the speed of trust."**

We learned about Whakapapa in a book by [Owen Eastwood](#) called [Belonging, the Ancient Code of Togetherness](#) and think it is relevant given the significant headwinds we are facing as a country with respect to the breakdown of trust within our teams and communities.

Eastwood is part Maori and part Englishman and works with professional sports teams around the world building current and authentic origin stories for teams like the New Zealand All Blacks and the South African Proteas. He helps teams create and define their own Whakapapa, and then creates processes for enabling their efforts to honor it.

Honoring everyone's past is the first step taken to make sure that all members of the team feel like their past is honored and respected as they start to build a new collective vision for the team each season. This is in stark contrast to the past dominant cultures of sports teams where the new players are hazed and are not respected until they perform on the field. It is a necessary shift away from a fear-based culture.

Sports teams are not work teams, yet in some ways, they are more dynamic or brutal on human capital than the fastest growing tech company. If you can't impact the game, you

won't see the field let alone be on the team. So why should the sports teams care about connection when everyone is just one injury away from being out for the season? **Why go through all the hassle on the "soft stuff"?**

The answer according to Eastwood's book is that creating a sense of belonging is the fastest way to get a group of people to volunteer to climb into the physical and emotional pain cave of practice and games which are table stakes in professional sport.

Another insight is that once you create a culture of high achievement and an "all in" attitude you are getting science on your side. The positive endorphins that come from being the pursuit of being elite with others are being heavily researched and appear to be a new secret sauce. This is why many of the best runners run with other runners, and the best swimmers swim with other swimmers. To get from good to great involves pain management which starts in the brain. A great way to trick the brain to volunteer for future pain is to be around other people who are climbing the "hard fun hill."

In a post covid world, the team that adapts faster has the advantage. As the disconnection rises all around them, your teammates will be more likely to contribute all they have to your team when they feel connected to each other.

Now is the time to create an environment where people feel like they belong.



Essential Element #3

Stop Saying Stupid Things Out Loud!

In the last chapter we talked about helping your team feel like they belong through the **Māori term Whakapapa**. Connection can resonate but leads to the question, **it feels great to belong, now how do we win?**

Belonging and winning.... now that is like peanut butter and chocolate!

Winning involves communication which includes picking a method or channel of communication and then defining what and how you will communicate. Picking the channel can be a challenge. With most of the professional world carrying a supercomputer in their pocket daily, we are now faced with a multi-channel communications nightmare. Do you text, do you e-mail, do you call, do you leave a voicemail, or do you just write them a letter? All these options, including face to face communication, have created a litany of choices for people to communicate well - or as we often observe to not communicate at all.

Learning from indigenous Native Americans one of the first things that a tribe will do is establish a code of conduct that includes communication channels. Who says what, when, and why, matter. In our experience the larger the human system the more important it is to establish a clear language for communicating the critical elements that are needed to accomplish the right next task.

The late Mental Strength Coach [Trevor Mowad](#) introduced the concept of not saying the wrong things as a great place to start as you create a language for communicating the right things at the right time. Mowad worked with the football teams at Georgia and Alabama and job #1 was getting the players to “SSSTO!”



This may sound simple enough, but when you are looking to build the best college football team in some of the hottest parts of the country during the summer, **putting a lid on the complaining and negative talk is no small task**. In this video Mowad discussed how they convinced a very young and diverse group of players to “SSSSO!”

If you don't have time for the video here are the cliff notes.

1. What you say can shock or fuel what you and others think by 10X.
2. Negative communication is 4 to 7x more impactful than positive communication.
3. Instead of worrying about always being up, **just don't verbalize the down.**
4. These claims are supported by research from Georgetown professor [Christine Porath](#).

The cumulative work of Mowad has been outlined in two books, "[It Takes What It Takes](#)" and "[Getting to Neutral.](#)"

The new idea is to not fight negative with positive but to focus on a neutral framework that allows the real awful to be dealt with efficiently and to not worry about having to always spin things to a positive. **At the same time, it keeps a lid on the negativity taking over and controlling the vibe.**

We don't think you should waste a single crisis to build a team that has a mental framework to:

- Get to the brutal truth.
- Identify the next most important tasks.
- **Establish a cadence of action** and iteration.

You may not get a degree or certification to show what you have accomplished since the pandemic started in 2020, but you have been building the mental muscle to deal with the increased severity and frequency of a globally connected world that is irritable.



Essential Element #4

When is the Right Time to Have a Hard Conversation?

Another competitive advantage in the area of communication is a team's ability to talk about what's most important first and to not avoid the hard conversations. We have observed that within human systems the people with power are more comfortable having hard conversations than the people with low power. We believe that it should be the aim of the leader to push the ability and interest in having a hard conversation to the lowest powered people in the company.

This will not occur without a script or a common lingo that can be practiced so that people can use the code words that will enable them to signal to others that they'd like to have an important conversation at that moment. When your team has a diverse background you cannot assume that they will all have the same language for conflict resolution and that includes tone and body language not just content. How you talk about hard things and when you talk about hard things is something the leader is should want to establish as soon as possible.

When you walk into a locker room and ask the first person you meet when the right time is to have a hard conversation you will know if the leaders have given that person a language or not.

"Now would be fine" is the answer we preach and teach.

Of course, this is an easy answer for someone who has authority or position power.

But what about at the other end of the spectrum?

Our experiences suggest the answer is often...."NEVER is just fine by me!"

So how do we empower our people to consider changing their answer?

It starts with organizing and prioritizing your own schedule and continues in how you share your choices with others.

[Geoffrey Moore](#) who has successfully advised Marc Benioff at Salesforce and Satya Nadella at Microsoft recently wrote about how the word "priority" entered our language in only the singular form. He is suggesting that the CEO needs to set [THE PRIORITY](#) and that the team should either buy in or leave.

Talk about a hard conversation.

If you are leading a smaller team, like a Jeffrey Bezos "[two pizza](#)" team, or in military parlance a sub unit you may have a very clear directive from above, but there is still the challenge of managing the disparate tasks.

The team at www.thearmyleader.co.uk have a series of excellent posts about small unit cohesion and execution. The articles are current and written by those who have recently been in active military service.

No matter where you sit on the power curve when you organize and prioritize your tasks and share them with your superior you are having a hard conversation with yourself first, this is a habit worth honing.

We use the following template as a constraint to develop our planning abilities.

Prioritizing					
A High Priority	Est. Time	B Medium Priority	Est. Time	C Low Priority	Est. Time
<u>Fire Drills:</u>					

www.banyantreestrategies.com

DEALING WITH THE "YEAH BUT"

Right about now, you, the reader may have already had an internal dialogue that is the mother of all "keep it the same" traps.

You said, "yeah but in my case it's different" and you moved on from seriously considering changing or adapting your actions or behaviors.

Guess what, your people might be saying that to themselves when YOU are talking!

"Yeah But" is what creates the conversational graveyard between people on a team.

TURNING A GROUP INTO A TEAM



Inside of tribes all over the world one of the first things leaders do after they control the dress code is they control who talks and what they say.

It is this command-and-control style that starts and feeds the conversational graveyard that starts to undermine the team's ability to trust each other and effectively execute the leaders plans.

In our last chapter "[Stop Saying Stupid Sh*t Outloud](#)" [Trevor Mowad](#) described how culture is built or destroyed by words and phrases shared out loud and the 7 to 10x impact of negative language on a team.

Three phrases that can help anyone who is challenged by hard conversations.

Here are three phrases that low power people can employ to help them engage in having hard conversations early and to help clean out their team's conversational graveyard.

"That is interesting, can you say more about that."

Say this when a statement is made, like "There is no way, we are going to win that business".

The response to your question will typically be the "why" behind the statement.

Once you have the why, you can get a window into the logic or emotion that the other person is carrying into that topic.

"I hear you."

This is another conversational enabler and is often best used when someone is being dramatic or dogmatic in making a point.

Conversational graveyards typically emerge in the "build best team" stage of our Group to Team image. Conflict happens and without a common language for processing the conflict a great deal of tension starts to build and it needs a home. Burying the issue can work for a while but eventually the dead become undead instead of talking things out, stressed out people act them out or worse yet, they blurt them out.

Your empathetically stated "I hear you" can really land and take the air out of the balloon. Frustrated people sometimes don't need agreement as much as they need to feel heard.

"That's the easy part, can we talk about the hard part?"

This phrase is a lane changer, or kind of like putting the clutch in so you can shift gears.

It is best delivered slowly and then you should pause for a few seconds to let the other side know you are going to bring up something new and potentially difficult. Understanding these phrases and then putting them into your conversational tool belt take time and practice. If you are looking to learn more about these topics, we have two book recommendations.

The first is the gold standard going back decades by the team at Vital Smarts Inc. "[Crucial Conversations, Tools for Talking When the Stakes are High](#)" has sold millions of copies over the decades and is still as relevant as ever. A more recent offering from retired FBI negotiator Chris Voss is "[Never Split the Difference](#)" and while the title connotes that you will learn negotiating tips, the first thing you learn is a mindset and tool kit for entering into a conversation where the outcome is in doubt and therefore could be unsafe or hard.

Regardless of your role as leader or follower these tools and short phrases should help your team answer our title's question with a resilient and patient...NOW WOULD BE FINE.



Essential Element #5

Define What's Fair & the Difference Between Leadership & Management

Very few human systems have a completely flat culture. In most cases there is going to be somebody at the top of an org chart that's responsible to the public for the outcomes this group has been put together to accomplish. The moment you have a responsible party or parties you start to deal with the difference between management and leadership. Another culture killing word called **fairness** can also emerge. The astute leader is going to establish very quickly what is fair and what is the difference between leadership and management on this team. We have noticed the best teams expect everyone to lead and are open to being managed. **Universal accountability to the mission and understanding that undefined fairness can be a cancer are key elements to establish as soon as you can on a team.**

Sport and work teams correlate easily and yet the tension that exists around playing time and who has the ball at the end of the game seems to be unique to sport. What is fair, how people lead themselves and how they allow themselves to be directed are foundational issues on a sport team. **Understanding how the best teams have dealt with this tension could afford the business leader some transitory insights.**

Fairness and Roles

Warming the bench or getting garbage minutes can really challenge a person's commitment to putting in the extra effort in practice. The great arbiter of sport is playing time on a team that is competing to win a championship. The coaches control playing time and they need players who are ready to perform their best inside the system they have designed and taught in practice. **It is very challenging to create an intense practice environment with players who know they have different amounts of playing time during the game.**

Sometimes the starters want to take it easy and rest up for the big game and sometimes the backup players aren't sure the effort is worth it. It begs the question, why hustle to just watch the game from the bench? The coach has the whistle and can change practice from the fun of scrimmaging to the drudgery of conditioning, but most don't want to go to that well too often.

John Wooden, who was voted the coach of the 20th Century by ESPN deployed a tactic and a methodology to address these issues. He communicated individually with each of his players the role he anticipated them playing on the team as early as he could. This declaration was based on what he knew at that time, and he made sure to balance the reality of the present with the possibility of a better future.

In business **Reid Hoffman** and **Ben Casnocha** wrote "[The Alliance](#)" where they introduce the concept of meeting individually every 45 days during an 18-month tour of duty for key employees in an effort to have their best performers feel that the company's mission and their personal contribution were connected. Importantly the meeting was focused on the employee first and the company second and proved to greatly increase retention rates.

In both settings, **knowing your role and understanding how that role helps the team succeed goes a long way to maximizing the daily contributions** everyone chooses to bring which enables the leaders to build a high-performance team.

Wooden's methodology for fairness is also a piece of timeless treasure that many young coaches and managers fail to implement. Discipline and compliance to small details have become hallmarks of championship lore. Nothing spreads faster than when someone breaks a hard and fast rule of being late to practice or another rule that is in place to keep many people in order. For some reason we all take solace when somebody else gets some time in the penalty box.

Zero tolerance can really catch a leader off guard late in the season and potentially having the team distracted at precisely the moment you need them focused on a championship performance. **Wooden established early that fairness was earned and deserved based upon past contributions or performances.** This subtle change gave him room to have strict rules that enabled buy in by all to prioritize the team above other distractions and yet to not allow small infractions to get in the way of allowing everyone on the team to accomplish the goal of winning the championship.

Swen Nater & Ronald Gallimore go into more detail on this methodology in their book "[You Haven't Taught Until They Have Learned.](#)" Swen is a great resource as he was Bill Walton's back up for 3 years at UCLA under John Wooden and hardly saw the floor and yet was a first-round draft pick and had a successful 11-year pro career.

Defining what is fair and then connecting people to how their role maximizes the contribution they can make to the unit's success is something a leader should do early and when consistently administered should give everyone the latitude they need to adapt to outside issues that inevitably arise.

Leadership and Management

Over the last 10 years leadership and management have seen a blending of their definitions and management has been taking it in the teeth with meme after meme declaring the benefits of leadership and the horrors of management.

However, when looked at through the lens of competing to win a championship the players and coaches need to work in consensual interdependence and **both management and leadership should be clearly defined and differentiated.** Understanding and honoring the differences can be a key contributor to the unit's success.

Peter Drucker liked to say that to manage was to think with someone and if necessary to think for someone while they were learning the task. [Jack Clark of University of California Rugby fame has a YouTube](#) talk on the differences between leadership and management and how he defines them on his teams. From Clark's perspective he requires that every player lead themselves and adhere to the values that make up their culture. They accomplish this by having a series of questions they ask themselves and by answering in the affirmative they show their fealty to the unit.

Clark further outlines that within the team they need to waste as little time as possible on contextual matters that can be delegated to a small subset of the team, the captains. Everyone on the team consents to being managed and directed by the leaders so they can focus on playing the highly adaptive game of rugby where the coach hardly speaks to the players during the game and only the captains can speak to an official.

Companies may appear to have some advantages over sports teams when it comes to establishing questions that allow their people to lead themselves, yet we seldom come across them. Identifying your teams most valued values is something you can learn in about [two hours with this DIY worksheet](#). We have found this exercise brings people together and allows them to create questions that empower everyone to bring their best.

As a coach or a business leader please consider learning from these dedicated practitioners of unit cohesion. It is hard to keep it fair and not lose your team's commitment while you are competing, why not take a page from their successful playbooks?



Essential Element #6

Getting to Your Best Team Effort Through Assertive Practice and Play

Much of what we have been discussing seems like it should be dealt with in the preseason before you hit the field, and yet you know you're going to keep coming back to these issues as you get further along in the season. Accomplishment feels great and winning builds buy-in, so you want to establish an all-out mentality when it comes to your practices. Yet, there's a problem. Inside of every human system is a group that's not sure about where things are going, and they slow everything down to keep things the same. **We call this group the lazy middle.**

One of the ways you combat the lazy middle is to establish a code for your practices that your captains establish as the minimum acceptable standard for wearing the uniform. There's a moment when you put on that uniform that you commit to a certain level of effort. There is a moment when you open an e-mail for your company where you commit to a certain level of professionalism. Membership in a special force's unit at a company, the military or academic institution is a privilege. Exerting a maximum effort is sometimes what makes practice and preparation almost as much fun as the performance itself.

Along with team building and listening to your players, **coaches and leaders should seek to create an environment where everyone can learn how to go at game speed both individually and as a unit.** A leader needs to have a plan and a correlating structure for going all-out together.

The cauldron of controlled conflict will allow your team to trust each other more as they see that others can match their best and that you can even get the sum of the parts to add up to more when the active ingredients of **trust, precision and planned adaptability** are inserted into your practices. Your best performers are going to want to push their limits, and you will need hard practices to allow everyone to improve together.

As Tom Hanks so perfectly said in his role as the washed-up Jimmy Dugan in "A League of Their Own," **It is the hard that makes it worth it.**

Why do you need trust?

Sports teams give us great examples of this and while the correlations to work are not 100%, they are similar. The team that doesn't trust each other when under duress will stop sharing the ball and a form of "hero ball" will ensue. Bill Belichick of New England Patriots fame has been known to try and force this on his opposition by taking away one key player from the other side and seeing if the other team can adapt. Adaptability is

another key ingredient, but before you can adapt you need to be able to trust each other.

In a work context this could come up if a colleague who normally plays a key role leaves your company or is out sick. Who else can step into their shoes and be ready for the big presentation to a prospect or provide an internal report?

Our magic formula for building trust is SE=C=T=Success

SE stands for Shared Experiences, C stands for window into your Character, and T stands for Trust.

Going full speed in practice or in a conference room and being hard on the idea or ball and kind to each other is a fantastic, shared experience. With enough of these shared experiences everyone on the team starts to understand the character and commitment of all involved and this organically builds a trust that is experience born.

Why do you need precision?

To manage is to think for, with, or through something by yourself or with others. In this situation a good manager is thinking through the process of running an effective all-out practice or meeting where everyone is committed to being hard on the idea or ball while still being respectful of others.

The precision comes in the form of the constraints you will put the team in before you release them to perform. In a sales context you could create a scenario where you are up against company B for an RFP and the buyer is saying that they are offering a similar product but for 20% less. What questions should you ask and how should you respond?

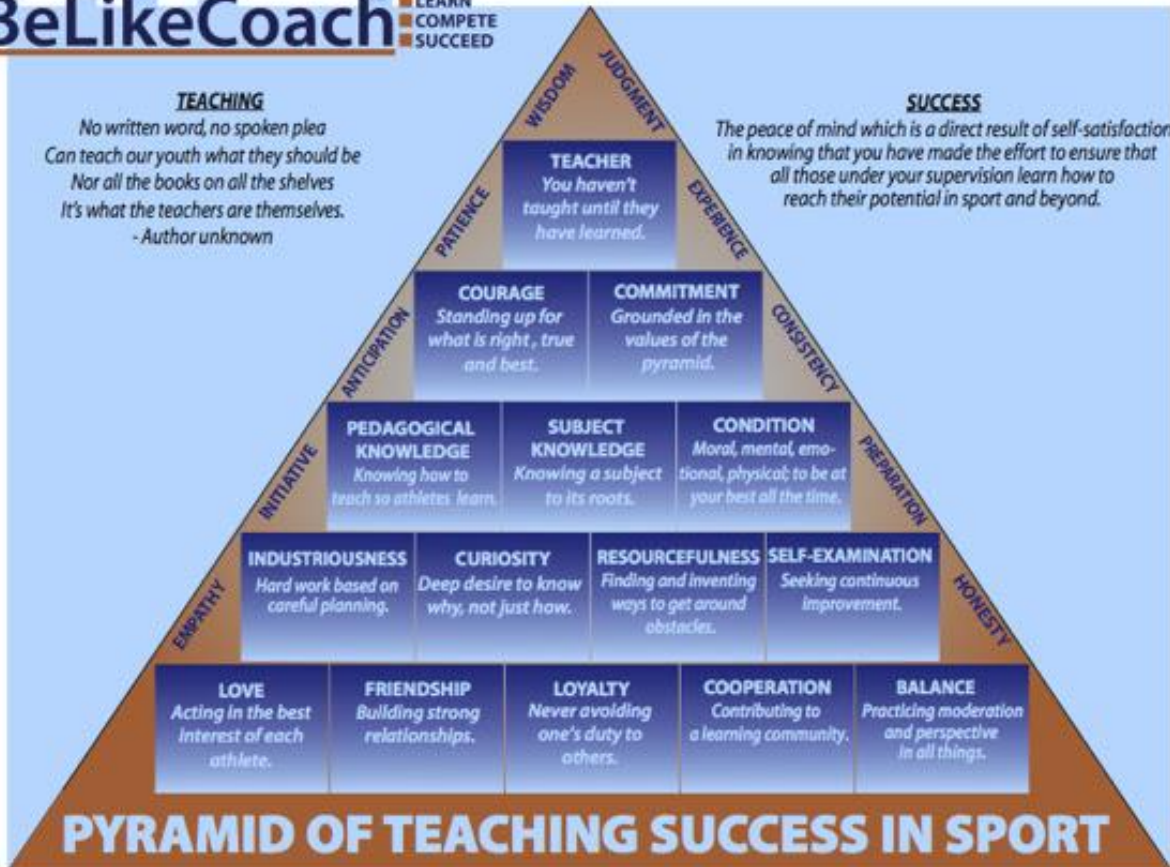
In a sports context you can create drills where you are giving one side an advantage and then teaching through the constraint to help the players adapt.

The best in business and sport identifies moments of maximum influence (MOMI's) and train their teams to be aware of them and how to react and perform with great fundamentals.

The prior preparation of the leader is crucial to leveraging the effort that assertive play is asking of your team. **Don't ask them to go 100% if you haven't prepared for everyone to receive at least that much in return for the effort.**

Why do you need adaptability?

The final triangle in John Wooden's pyramid of success is **Competitive Greatness**. "To be at your best when it is needed. Take enjoyment of a difficult challenge."



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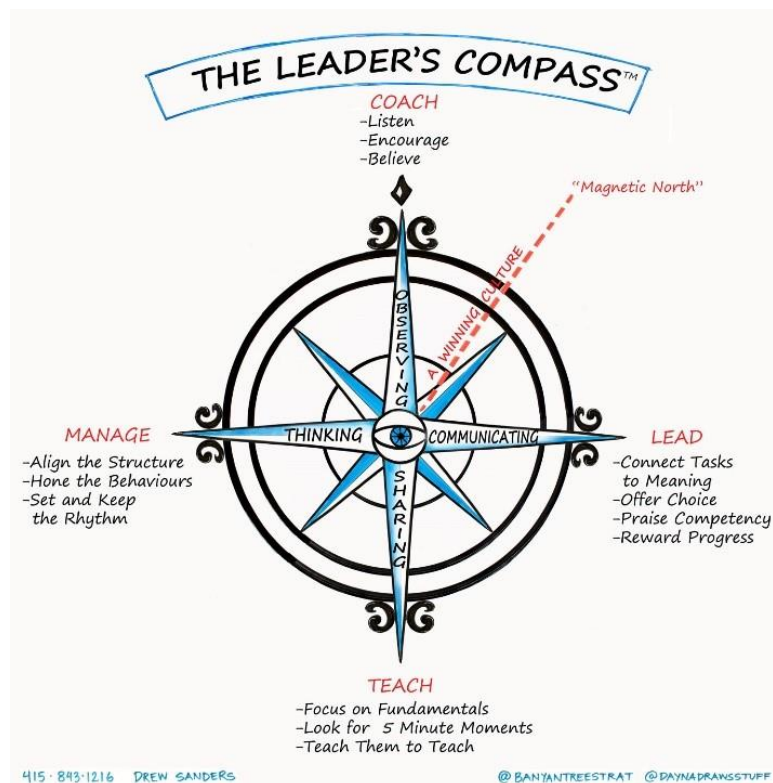
It has been decades since Wooden's UCLA teams dominated college basketball but even then, it was a highly competitive sport with hundreds of great players on different teams all of whom were striving to win the NCAA title.

Wooden won nine titles, including seven in a row, and for most of the games would be seated on the bench. This is in stark contrast to his fellow coaches at the time and more obviously in the present.

Wooden was quoted as saying that the work had been done in practice by the coaches and the players and that the job of adapting to the game itself was in the hands of the players. **Wooden knew that if his players could not recognize the tactics of the other team and then adapt that he could never call enough time-outs to do it for them.**

Changing up the practices and altering the way you practice by adding constraints to enhance your team's adaptability all can build a mental elasticity that will matter in the biggest moments.

We created the Leaders Compass years ago and continue to notice that as people lead themselves and others, they are moving on several axes with one of them being the ability to persevere balanced by the need to adapt.

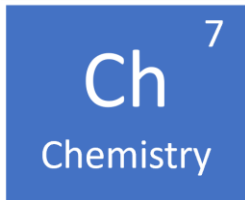


On its first day, Basketball was more like Indoor Rugby - A great example of adapting.

Faced with an upcoming rainy season in Springfield, Massachusetts [James Naismith is credited with inventing the game of basketball](#). He brought the boys inside and put up a couple of peach baskets on the wall and gave them a soccer ball. He told them that a point was scored when the ball went into the basket. The boys played the new game with vigor and soon enough the injuries piled up as the boys ran with the ball and tackled each other on the hard gym floor. Undeterred by their ailments, the boys were happy and wanted to keep playing the next day.

Naismith used all three principles we have discussed and added some constraints to allow the boys to keep playing and stay healthy enough to play. Rules were assigned (like no running with the ball and no tackling) which required adaptability, and trust was given and received between the players and Naismith.

Playing with Vigor.... that was the easy part as players love to play!



Essential Element #7

Team Chemistry & Humor – Do They Matter?

Our final three Essential Elements of Close-Knit Teams focus on **team chemistry, championship adaptability, and how ceremony can create a flywheel for building a sustainable and healthy winning culture.**

At some point in the season every team faces the issue of burn out. Additionally the season can be long, and as things start to crescendo into the playoffs people can get a little uptight. The insightful leader seeks to insert the right amount of humor to help take the edge off. The leader should understand the beat and meter of what makes the team tick and what will be funny and what won't. It is as much art as it is science but knowing what the team needs and the moment it needs a chuckle is something we think every leader should be listening for.

Is Team Chemistry Even Real?

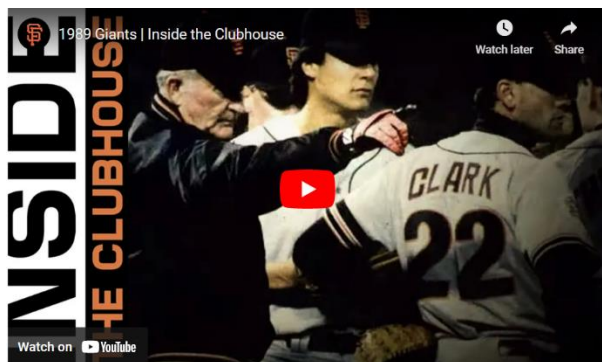
Team chemistry is seldom described in a clinical manner; it appears to be ethereal vs empirical and is described as a “you know it when you see it” phenomenon. We were elated when we stumbled across [Joan Ryan's](#) well researched book [“Intangibles, Unlocking the Science and Soul of Team Chemistry.”](#) Joan has covered sports for her entire career and has been at the forefront of women's leadership in sports journalism, she is a powerful writer, and an easy read.

Ryan takes on the validity of team chemistry in the book. Her interviews with crusty professionals like Jeff Kent and Barry Bonds are great examples that she wasn't just looking for easy answers to the hard question, **does team chemistry even matter?** Ryan's work helps any coach who is looking to define something that most athletes struggle to describe. You get the sense that the author noticed that when people gel, unexpected positive outcomes seem to happen with uncommon frequency.

Digging into the research she compiled to go along with her interviews, we wanted to highlight an article that was published in the [International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology in May of 2011](#). A team of five researchers from the University of British Columbia school of Human Kinetics looked at **“Informal roles on sport teams.”** Their research produced ten labeled roles that players are apt to fall into when working with others on a collective task. Their research identified three types that were detrimental to their success.

Humm Baby!

Ryan had a strong supporter in former SF Giants Pitcher and now long time TV broadcaster Mike Krukow. Krukow helped her overlay this research on their 1989 World Series Team known as the Humm Baby Giants. Krukow could name every type on their team and how they managed the different types to collectively get to winning baseball without trying to force everyone to act the same way.



As much as we all appreciate the uniformity of a military drill team and understand how in certain situations the precision and unity of that effort requires nothing but absolute compliance and obedience, there are many situations where that is a recipe for human disaster. **The rubber band of personality always seems to find a way to snap back.**

As leaders and managers of others in family, sport, and work we recognize the importance in identifying and working with your teams' interests, strengths, and styles. The University of British Columbia's research coupled with Ryan's compelling book have been extremely helpful, and we think their findings are a big part of competing at the highest level and enjoying the accompanying challenges. Here are the labels and the corresponding definitions.

Informal Role	Definition
Comedian	An athlete who entertains others through the use of comical situations, humorous
Spark Plug	An athlete who ignites, inspires, or animates a group toward a common goal. May be referred to as a task booster.
Cancer	An athlete who expresses negative emotions that spread destructively throughout a team.
Distractor	An athlete who draws away or diverts the attention of other teammates decreasing their focus
Enforcer	An athlete who is physically intimidating or willingly belligerent and who is counted on to retaliate when rough tactics are used by the opposing team.
Mentor	An athlete who acts as a trusted counselor or teacher for another athlete on the team.
Informal Leader - Non Verbal	An athlete who leads the team by example, hard work, and dedication.
Informal Leader - Verbal	An athlete who leads the team both on and off the playing surface through verbal commands
Team Player	An athlete who gives exceptional effort and can be seen as a workhorse that is willing to sacrifice and put the team before his/her own well-being.
Star Player	An athlete who is distinguished or celebrated because of their personality, performance, and/or showmanship.
Malingeringer	An athlete who prolongs psychological or physical symptoms of injury for some type of external gain
Social Convener	An athlete who is involved in the planning and organization of social gatherings for a team to increase group harmony and integration.

Why are Bill Walsh's PE Classes having more fun than mine?

Starting in the fall of 2021 we did our own research with players from Super Bowl winning teams, leaders of companies that have gone public, and world class hospital executives and can support Ryan's findings. However, one interview going back about six years before this book was published stands out.

One of our favorite mentors and a world class sports psychologist was [Glen Albaugh](#). Glen lived in Stockton and lived an amazingly varied and wonderful life. His work with applied psychology goes back to his PHD in sports psychology from the University of Utah in 1971. He was a long-time friend of Michael Murphy of "Golf in the Kingdom" fame and while a professor at The University of The Pacific taught and was close to Pete

Carroll who coaches the Seattle Seahawks. He also coached high school basketball and was the Men's Golf coach at UOP while Drew was playing for Cal.

Sara and Drew both saw Glen in his capacity as a sport psychologist while we were playing golf professionally and he had a stable of very successful touring professionals. Glen wrote "[Winning the Game Within](#)" which had an excerpt about Sara in the book.

About six years ago after bumping into Glen at dinner he agreed to allow me to interview him over lunch about his life as a coach and youth educator. We met 10 times, and I would always record our conversations and then have them transcribed and sent to him. The nuggets from those lunches abound, and yet it was an off handed observation from him that I come back to the most. **"Why were Bill Walsh's PE classes having more fun than mine?"**

Wait, Bill Walsh was a PE coach?

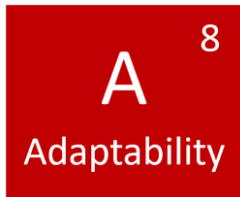
Yes, at Washington High School in Fremont while they were both making ends meet and just getting started. I asked Glen why and he responded because Bill could sense where his class was and then would adapt the tone and meter of his communication.

Walsh the Bellhop

Fast forward to the 49ers first Super Bowl in 1982 and with Walsh as head coach he sensed the team's mood and recognizing they were a little tight donned the bellman's coat and cap at the hotel and helped the players with their luggage as they got off the bus as a gag. He read the mood, knew his players, and helped take some air out of the room. What a pro.



Everyone's leadership journey is unique, and history may not repeat but it surely rhymes. We hope these insights from others empower you to keep paying attention to the little things that help your group become more like a team and your team become one of those special tight knit units where everyone can't wait for the next reunion!



Essential Element #8

Scaling Adaptability with the OODA Loop

Whether you are preparing for the championship game or the largest RFP in your company's history you're going to be facing competitors who are also all in. Having a system that your team follows to stay adaptive and flexible is crucial. There are a few teaching moments you will probably want to let go by during a season but observing and communicating with each other is not one of them. The remarkability meter continues to move which means what worked yesterday may not work today. **The team that has everyone observing and sharing what they see with the rest of the team increases its chance for championship success.**

Our final two Essential Elements of winning teams are about **championship adaptability** and using ceremony to create a flywheel of sustainable energy for winning the right way.

In previous posts we looked at a variety of factors that a leader can work with to help the team trust each other, go all out, use failure as a constraint to get better, and be all in. All of it connects to the hope of a championship victory which in most cases will not be handed to you. Rather you will face a worthy adversary who be equally talented and similarly committed, and you will have to emerge victorious.

How do you avoid being what John Madden famously said about the NFL, which is there is one winner and everyone else is a loser and **the team that lost the super bowl is the first loser.** The words may sting but ask Marv Levy who coached the Buffalo Bills to four Super Bowls and lost them all. Ask anyone who was told they finished 2nd in the big RFP and you will get the same answer, you get to the championship to win it!

Adapt!

The massive distance between finishing first and second helps create the tension that makes for good theater. No one watches the NFL Pro-Bowl (it has recently been dissolved) because nobody cares about the outcome. Part of the intrigue in a tightly contested game is how the best act and react to each other as things unfold. Both the New England Patriots and the Golden State Warriors are famous for their half time adjustments and 3rd quarter success.

In previous posts we have looked at how John Wooden [would not stalk the sidelines](#) of the game as he needed his players to be adapting and didn't want to distract them. Basketball is a great example of adaptability because the ball is in play the moment it is scored and put back onto the court. Jay Bilas in his book Toughness outlined the "next

play” mentality that Mike K installed at Duke which starts with the mental ability to get over the loss of the basket on defense and the opportunity to gain a basket on the other end.

Sport can give us some good examples but inside the military there is a clean framework that is highly transferable and trainable.

OODA

Airforce Colonel John Boyd was a world class fighter pilot and changed how our war planes were built in this country. Colonel Boyd also left behind a decision-making framework that is the standard for our military and can be of real use to leaders who are looking to empower their teams with a way to build out championship adaptability.

The OODA loop stands for Observe, Orient, Decide, Act and is born out of air-to-air combat training that earned Colonel Boyd the nickname (40 Second Boyd) because he would allow his combatant an advantage position on him and within 40 seconds would be able to kill them.

Observe what is causing your discomfort or pain, measure the size and scope and do not hedge the size or seriousness of its power.

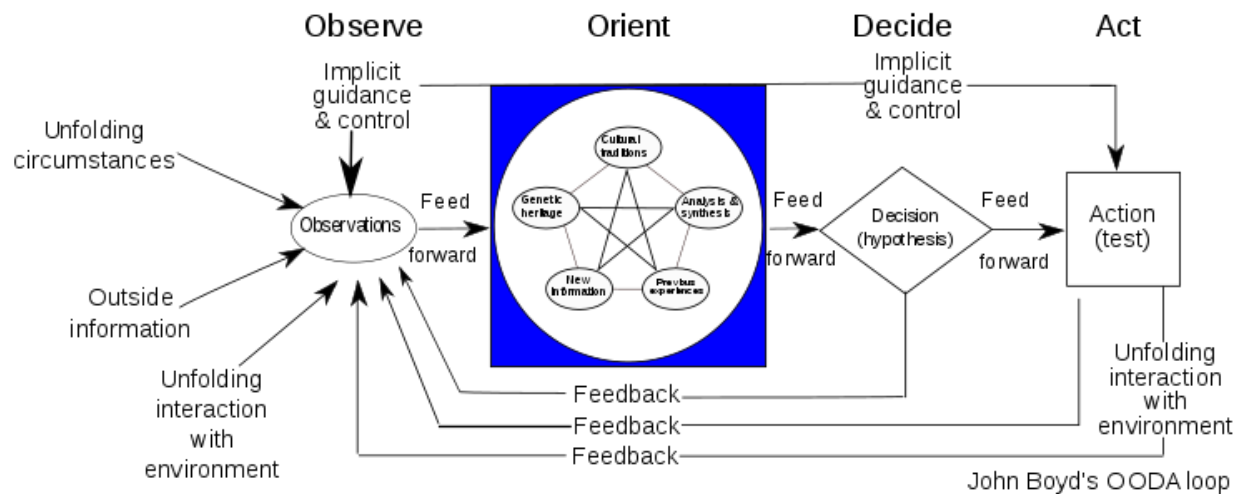
Orient yourself and your assets to the enemy. How can you adapt given what you have currently within reach?

Decide on action to take.

Act on that decision.

Reflect and run the loop again.

Much of the OODA loop training in the military focuses on how to run the loop faster than your enemy, to get inside their OODA loop. Today's climate is perfect for taking that same point of view. **Consider running a daily OODA loop for yourself, and family. Run a daily OODA loop for your work team.** These simple questions will allow you to get to the brutal truth as quickly as possible which will allow you to adapt.



Hopefully you can take this framework and customize it for your situation. Who is your competition? Where are they strong? How are you positioned relative to them in the marketplace? **Which factors does a potential customer need to prioritize to pick your offering over others?** How can you position the questions that are asked to highlight the factors that help you win?

Whether it is in sport or work you can overlay the OODA loop framework and start to train your team to either take physical or verbal action. As you run this loop you are increasing your team's chances of victory and getting everyone ready to adapt in the biggest moments.



Essential Element #9

How Ceremony Can Create a Flywheel of Positive Energy for Teams

We wrap up our series on the Essential Elements of Close-knit Teams by looking at the power of ceremony and ritual to cement the bonds that can last a lifetime. How you **say hello** and how you **say goodbye** have been proven to make a lasting impact, and with a work or sports team it matters even more. The buzz of doing it right feels great and the sting of doing it poorly can last a lifetime.

Saying Hello

We began by highlighting Owen Eastwood's work on how to bring people from widely different cultures together. His book "**Belonging**" drives home how important it is to have ceremony at the beginning of a season or when a new person is added. Instead of the new person being the "low man" or paying a new person tax, they are welcomed as an important member of the community.

Getting off to a Good Start

As the leader of the team, you are weaving several different common threads together each year. You make sure that everyone can connect to the aligned vision, understand their role, and feel at home. You also give them room to push themselves and have a major say in how they are going to pursue their best self. Finally, you equip them to take that best self and combine it with others to make a collective effort that can compete at the highest level possible. The best players usually want to get better and love to work with and for people who help them improve. As you allocate the time between culture, effort, and skill you are weaving a collective rope that bonds everyone involved with the mission together.

How do you Build a Flywheel that Sustains the Right Culture?

The astute leader seeks to create a safe place first and then should facilitate a discussion on what matters most and how the team will take the key actions towards the agreed upon goal. Reid Hoffman wrote about the way they scaled LinkedIn in his book "**The Alliance**" amidst the challenges of a Silicon Valley work culture which was talented but prone to job hopping which undermined their mission.

One way to connect people to a common vision is to give them a say in what the values

of the team are. We have adapted the alignment and value process they used into a “**Groups2Teams**” process that can take between one and two hours. When a leader facilitates this process, the team ends up owning the values because they chose them.

Jack Clark, the head coach for Men's Rugby at Cal has taken this to the next level by attaching a question that each member can ask themselves to hold them to the standard of that value. We call this a dynamic question because it activates the value and helps your team self-regulate whether they are a unit of 10, 1,000 or even 100,000 people. Here are a series of videos Jack did with some other coaches at the **What Drives Winning Coaches Symposium**.

Once a team has a common way, they will act it becomes much easier for leaders from within the organization to emerge. These leaders will embody the values on their path to accomplishing the stated goals. The correlation between action and success only emboldens the culture. **The leaders are often called captains and the coach that can empower captains has a major competitive advantage.** Captains take recruits on their campus visits. Captains recruit people from other companies to join the team. Captains drive the herd to cull the wrong behaviors that can sabotage a team's success. Captains drive and build culture and over time as they age out or move up in a work environment, they are a major part of the organization's stored value or flywheel of culture.

Saying Goodbye and Building out the Alumni Network

Hoffman also addresses the reality of people leaving your organization and takes a page from the university system by calling it an alumni network. This connection may seem like a stretch at first because many people leave a company on different terms than they left or graduated from their school. However, alumni fit the goal that the company should have, which is to honor those that move on in such a way that they might be a good resource for future employees.

In a sports team context, the end of a season marks the dissolving of a class or year and should not be missed regardless of the outcomes on the field. Championship teams can pass around hardware like trophies or rings but just as important is **how the players grew individually and collectively.** The armed forces sports teams are seldom national champions and yet after their tours of duty are finished every potential employer knows the values those players will bring to the interview or job.

Over time different teams or companies will build out a competitive advantage in recruiting because the alumni network will help the leaders select the right players more often. **Bo Schembechler** was the head football coach at Michigan and had a great line about recruiting.

“If you miss the right guy and he goes across the street, he might beat you once a year, but if

you take the wrong guy, he ends up beating you every day in practice.”

Your alumni network should understand what your “our kinda guys” or OKG is. With more nodes of intelligence out there the leaders have a better chance of digging down to the softer skills like heart or drive that can be missing on a video or a resume.

All these benefits are part of the reason it is so important to memorialize the commitment made, the relationships built, and the shared memories that were experienced at the end of a season. Companies can do this on a calendar basis with much of the same effect. The cadence of reflecting and honoring the past contributions can be a force multiplier as you move forward and seek to improve in the future.

In your organization regardless of your station we hope these elements are ones you can adopt to facilitate the creation of a close-knit unit as you seek to be a force multiplier for good.

CLOSING

The wall of indifference that coaches and leaders face daily is massive. The forces of self-interest are constant, and the feedback loops for building culture can appear eternally long. Then someone you haven't seen in a long time calls you coach, and it melts your heart.

If any of these elements sustain you in any way, then we are thrilled. If you think it could help a fellow player, co-worker, boss, stick with a commitment please share. If we are missing a key element or have something not quite right, let us know.

Sara and I have been on so many teams and yet like we said in the introduction very few of these have been close-knit teams. When we started our partnership over 25 years ago, we both brought an intense desire to build a close-knit team with our children. Families can have all the characteristics of a group or a team and we feel blessed to have a close-knit team with Ryan and Brooke.

We were both fortunate to have mentors in our life who were both teachers and coaches starting with our parents. Much of what we have discussed in the previous chapters we have learned from these past leaders and mentors. Bringing it all together for you is something that gives us great joy. Whether you are an individual contributor joining a team or whether you've been given your first team to lead we hope there's something here that will enable you to fill the roles that are needed to have success with others.

We believe that equipped coaches, non-profit and for-profit business leaders can be force multipliers for good in our society and will continue to observe and collect the best practices we can to empower this cohort.

