

## **Management Lessons from the World of Cricket**

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(This article was written at the time of the World Cup Tourney held in S. Africa.)

A successful organization has one major attribute that sets it apart from unsuccessful organizations: dynamic and effective leadership. According to one definition of leadership, it is "the activity of influencing people to strive willingly for group objectives". Leadership of course, does not imply only the CEO's style of leadership, but that of every manager in the hierarchy, at whatever level he is located, so long as he has people reporting to him and through whom he has to get work done.

Empirical studies suggest that leadership is a dynamic process, varying from situation to situation with changes in leaders, followers and situations. This brings us to the concept of Situational Leadership in which the emphasis is on the behavior of a leader in relationship to his followers.

Situational Leadership talks of four leadership behaviors:

*Telling:* Provide specific instructions and closely supervise performance.

*Selling:* Explain decisions and provide opportunity for clarification.

*Participating:* Share ideas and facilitate in making decisions.

*Delegating:* Turn over responsibility for decisions and implementation.

Each of these leadership styles is a combination of task and relationship behavior. Task behavior is the extent to which a leader provides direction for people: telling them what to do, when to do it, where to do it, and how to do it. It means setting goals for them and defining their roles.

Relationship behavior is the extent to which a leader engages in two-way communication with people: providing support, encouragement "psychological strokes", and facilitating behaviors. It means actively listening to people and supporting their efforts.

Effective leadership style calls for an appropriate style of management combining the right type of task and relationship behavior. What style to adopt would depend on the situation, and now that India has entered the Super Six and the World cup fever is at its peak, it would perhaps be appropriate to examine the leadership styles of various cricket captains, and draw some management lessons.

### **Telling: Get your Facts Right!**

South Africa was the close favourite - after Australia - to win the World Cup, yet they were eliminated in the qualifying games themselves, so what led to their elimination from the game?

That fateful night, South Africa needed 230 not 229 runs to be ahead of Sri Lanka. A goof up in the calculations of the runs required for winning, led to a wrong target being communicated to the batsmen at the crease, before rain stopped play go. As a sports columnist commented, "Pollock could have hollered out the target to Boucher and Klusener, held up a placard.... done whatever it takes as long as he got across the message that the team must win. Sadly, he must now rate as a first rate cricketer with second rate communication skills".

**Moral: When you have to adopt the Telling style, be sure you do your homework right, and provide clear direction to team members!**

**Delegate: Ensure Responsibility**

It was during the first ever tied Test in the history of the game between the West Indies and Australia at Adelaide. The game had come to a critical point and Wes Hall was to bowl the last over of the cliff-hanger game. Hall, excitable as most fast bowlers tend to be, was straining at the leash. The adrenalin was pumping, and as he reached the top of his run up, Hall looked as if he was ready to blow the batsman away from his wicket.

The captain, Frank Worrel, quickly sensed that Hall's emotions could get the better of his bowling - increasing the margin of error. He walked up to his best bowler and said: "Wes if you bowl a no-ball, you won't be able to get back to Barbados." No abuse no recrimination just a clear cut delegation with a gentle reminder of the responsibilities.

**Moral: When you delegate, a gentle reminder of the responsibilities could be a good idea!**

**Selling; Provide Direction**

Dennis Lillee was one of the greatest fast bowlers in the game, during a crucial part of a match, the captain Ian Chappell, noticing that Lillee's pace was flagging, walked up to him, and told him, "Dennis if I need a spinner I will ask Kerry (O'Keefe ) to bowl." Lillee got the message loud and clear and thundered down to bowl the quickest he had in the match!

**Moral: Get subordinates to psychologically "buy into" desired behavior.**

**Participating: Listen Actively**

During the last World Cup, Geoff Marsh and Captain Steve Waugh felt they needed more discipline and focus in what they were doing. They felt that the best way to do it was to put into place a drinking and time curfew. Though the team members appeared to have agreed in principle to this request, Tom Moody, a respected and senior member of the team, brought to the attention of Waugh, that this policy was causing discontent among some of the players. And as Waugh puts it, "We went back to treating the tournament as just another competition rather than placing it on a pedestal with extra expectations and pressure. It was a crucial decision that was made thanks to the honesty and input from a teammate."

**Moral: Listen actively to feedback from subordinates, and have the guts to reverse wrong decisions!**

**Clear and Inspiring Communication: Key to Successful Leadership**

Leadership in cricket then, is more than just taking wickets and scoring runs. Every delivery in cricket is a discrete event, and a captain can modify his tactics after every ball if he so desires. For that matter, a batting captain can send in multiple instructions during the course of an innings. But to make these effective, the communication between captain and player has to be clear and inspiring.

Similarly, in pharma marketing, it is more than just ringing in sales and conceiving brilliant strategies. Each call, each sales day, and each campaign are discrete events, where the manager has the option of modifying his tactics. But he has to study, analyze and act on information and to communicate his decisions clearly and inspiringly to his team members!

Lessons from the world of cricket (as from various other fields), can provide us valuable lessons on leadership. So during the forthcoming matches, watch out for the way the captains handle their teams – under pressure as well as under no pressure.

They could just provide you with important lessons in managing your teams!