

## WHAT MAKES A GREAT TEAM?

### TEAM Leadership In The World Cup

Now that the frenzy of the World Cup has subsided, we can take a step back and see what's there to learn about leadership, more specifically: Team leadership.

There are four key factors that will make a team great. I have coined an acronym TEAM to denote these 4 factors: Transforming Leadership, Enhancing Relationships, Aligning Roles and Responsibilities, and Managing Systems and Processes. Using this acronym, we can see how the coaches led their teams to success in the final rounds of the World Cup.

#### Transforming Leadership

What do the teams from Senegal, Germany, Korea and Brazil have in common? Great coaches. These coaches took their teams to the semi-finals and they were the ones who made the difference. To a lesser extent, other countries who did not go further have great coaches too, like Japan's Phillipe Troussier and England's Sven-Goran Eriksson.

Germany was not given any chance by punters but their coach Rudi Voeller believed in the German team. Brazil had Luiz Felipe Scolari, an outstanding coach.

Bruno Metsu was the blue-eyed coach of Senegal, who encouraged his players to laugh well into the night. The players said he was like father and brother to them.<sup>i</sup> He had such a great relationship with the Senegal Lions that they would call him all the time to see how he was doing.<sup>ii</sup> The star player, Diouf, sang his praises, "I can talk to him about everything – football, life, women." On how he handled his players, Metsu recounted, "I can be a cop when I need to be but I find it best to have a relaxed attitude."<sup>iii</sup>

In the corporate world, it is becoming a truism that talented staff don't leave the company, they leave bad bosses. In "leadership management", the new term for talent management, it is incumbent upon CEOs that they treat their people well. Or else, they might find themselves managing a bunch of dead woods!

Scolari called the Brazilian team his family. Ricardinho, a replacement for injured captain Emerson, remarked, "This really is a family, united in its goals and determination." Denilson, rescued from obscurity, confessed, "I was dead and he resurrected me."<sup>iv</sup> No wonder the players were willing to die for him to win the Cup!

Korea, under Guus Hiddink transformed a no-hoper into a team of committed fighters. Some might say they had a little help from the referees. But, no one could deny that the Korean team of 2002 was far different from the 1988 team that was knocked out in the first round. Guus Hiddink moulded them into a collective unit, with no room for prima donnas. As a result, there was no bad feeling when the first XI was announced.<sup>v</sup> The squad had an implicit and complete faith in their coach. Hiddink made them believe that they could take on any team in the world without fear.<sup>vi</sup>

One clear lesson from these four coaches' example is that there is no fixed leadership pattern for success. Each leader-coach expresses his own personality and style. But they all have the uncanny ability to transform their teams to achieve seemingly unattainable goals.

It was Big Phil, Brazilian coach, who surprised their opponents by playing aggressively in the first round with high winning scores. He had been known to be more defensive-minded coach. His strategy was to intimidate his opponents and struck a psychological advantage for Brazil

as they went into the quarter-finals. After Brazil thrashed Costa Rica 5-2 in Round 2, Ronaldo told planetfootball.com, "We have got a frightening attack and the best is still to come." It has been called the "fright attack"<sup>vii</sup> In contrast, Rob Hughes, a well-known soccer editor, theorized that what killed the favorites, France, Argentina and Portugal, was Fear. They had the burden of hope and pressuring expectation overpowered what was, or should be, a natural game.<sup>viii</sup>

There is one more characteristic about these leaders. All of them endured harsh criticisms. But they stuck to what they believed and proved their critics wrong. Leadership is about making tough decisions and galvanizing your team members to believe and work for the greater good.

### **Enhancing Relationships**

Great teams have members who work for each other.

There was no place for prima donnas. Big Phil chose players who worked for the team. Even Ronaldo, a striker, had to play defense. To synergize a Brazilian team of star players like Ronaldo, Carlos, Rivaldo, Cafu, Ronaldinho involves the ability to exploit each star quality of each player to complement one another. Only a great coach could do that.

In contrast, the Japanese team's two biggest stars, Nakata and Ono, were seen arguing over how a free kick should be executed in their game against Turkey. Each one was trying to hog the limelight. Predictably, they fouled it up. The rest is history: Japan got kicked out in the second round.

Strong relationship is a key to a great team.

Diouf, the star of Senegal attributed their success to this attitude, "there are no stars in the team, the star of Senegal is the collective."<sup>ix</sup>

When he first coached the Korean team, Hiddink noticed a hierarchical system among the players. The younger footballers had to bow to the seniors and had separate changing room from them. The Korean coach dismantled that and made them work together.

### **Aligning Roles and Responsibilities**

Brazil has the ability to take advantage of the inventive talents of Ronaldo, Rivaldo and Ronaldinho, assigning them specific roles and then let them innovate in the process. They have the other Brazilian players who play defensive mid-field roles.

Everyone had a specific role and responsibility. "In a group, one individual can't be responsible for a defeat or victory. Everyone has to do his job well...The whole group wins a game and the whole group loses." opined Marcos, the shot-stopper goal keeper hero in Brazil's 2-0 win over Belgium, who wanted to entire squad to share credit when the team wins and the blame when it loses<sup>x</sup>.

Sometimes in focusing on the strikers, we forget that goalkeepers do make the difference as well. In fact, all the teams in the semi-final had outstanding goalkeepers. Brazil had Marcos, Korea had Lee Woon Jae, Germany had the best goalkeeper in the world cup, Oliver Kahn. No one will ever forget the incredible saves by Rustu Recber. They are likened to the back-room staff in an organization. If the sales and marketing teams are the strikers in an organization, then the finance, human resource, IT, administrative staff are the goalkeepers of the company. Don't neglect them. They can make the difference between success or failure. Be vigilant. The financial fiasco of Emron and Worldcom again has testified to this truth!

The Korean team has Hiddink, who does a lot of tactical training and he chooses the right type of players for his formations.<sup>xi</sup> Every player is given a conditioning test where he is tested on his individual ability. Based on the results and his match performances, individual guidance is given to him.<sup>xii</sup> No wonder the Korean team dares to take on the world.

Translating this into the corporate world, it is also important for CEOs to focus on the strengths of the team. Stop complaining about what the team cannot do but keep

emphasizing and complimenting on what they can. Peter Drucker commented, "We must focus on our strengths until our weaknesses become irrelevant." Many of us do the opposite, we emphasize on people's weaknesses so that our strengths become irrelevant!

### **Managing Systems and Processes**

Germany is a master of systems and processes. Although having no great stars in the team, Germany's strength is their ability to execute set pieces, to maintain a tight defensive system and to execute counter-attacks consistently. Each set piece is rehearsed many times over, until it becomes instinctive. Throughout the World Cup, they played a strong tactical game. There is no doubt that a strong part of Germany's success is its efficient system.

Similarly, Korean coach Hiddink had an incredible back-room staff in his system of training his team: an assistant coach who was the technical coordinator, a Dutch physiologist who handled physical conditioning, two physiotherapists, two local goalkeeping coaches and an American computer analyst (who studied matches and analyzed the systems used by opponents, noting the runs, tactics, compiling comprehensive data and statistics).

Some may question the importance of systems by pointing to the free-flow creative approach of the Brazilians. But Big Phil did create the now famous Triple R Triangle system, coupled by the overlapping runs of Cafu and Carlos. It was a "no-system system", a sort of fuzzy mind-set management system made possible only because of their supremely innovative players.

What can we learn about systems in teamwork?

1. Strong efficient system is important in the organization.
2. Systems must suit the players not the players to the system.
3. Don't die for your systems, they can change. They must adapt to the changing environment.

World Cup and Leadership.

CEOs can make the difference when they

- become transforming leaders, by building trust with their staff,
- maximize their team potential by enhancing relationships
- aligning and clarifying roles, and
- managing their systems efficiently and effectively.

Who knows? One day, your team might win the World Cup of the corporate world!

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<sup>i</sup> "Senegal crafts another irresistible fairy tale." Rob Hughes, The Straits Times, June 17, p. A8, 2002.

<sup>ii</sup> "Hail Metsu and his Lions." The New Paper. June 19, p. 57, 2002.

<sup>iii</sup> "Hai Metsu and his Lions." The New Paper. June 19, p. 57, 2002.

<sup>iv</sup> "Scolari's Brazil looks to roll on unimpeded." Associated Press, reported by The Straits Times, June 16, p. 37, 2002.

<sup>v</sup> "Hiddink's Total Football". Wang Meng Meng, In an exclusive interview with Robert Alberts in The New Paper. June 19, p. 74, 75, 2002.

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<sup>vi</sup> “The Team that matters.” Suresh Nair, In an exclusive interview with Robert Alberts in The New Paper. June 16, p. 56, 2002.

<sup>vii</sup> “Beward our ‘fright attack’”. The New Paper. June 17, p. 53, 2002.

<sup>viii</sup> “What killed the favorites was...fear.” Rob Hughes, The Straits Times, June 16, p. 36, 2002.

<sup>ix</sup> “Hai Metsu and his Lions.” The New Paper. June 19, p. 57, 2002.

<sup>x</sup> “Jeepers Keepers.” Reuters. Reported by The New Paper. June 18, p. 66, 2002.

<sup>xi</sup> “Hiddink’s Total Football”. Wang Meng Meng, In an exclusive interview with Robert Alberts in The New Paper. June 19, p. 74, 75, 2002.

<sup>xii</sup> “Hiddink’s Total Football”. Wang Meng Meng, In an exclusive interview with Robert Alberts in The New Paper. June 19, p. 74, 75, 2002.