



Change

“Change Before You Have To” – Jack Welch

Leaves changing color marks the end of football season, and the end of football season signals the firing of so many head football coaches. If, however, a losing head coach “survives” the chopping block, he will be told that he must “fix it” immediately. If not, he will be fired at the end of next season (or sooner). He has one more chance... or else...

A typical, immediate response by head coaches and business leaders alike is a massive overhaul to their coaching staff or executive team. Only when confronted with this 11th hour, “crossing the Rubicon,” one- more- chance- or- else moment, do most leaders demand change with whom they work most closely.

It sometimes works. Very often, it is already too late. Leaders make three mistakes that ultimately lead to these unenviable moments. Following are what they are and the solutions to them.

The best teams have the best people. Without them, we have no chance. Zero. Best people have both the best behavior and the best performance. We will, thankfully, sometimes hire “best.”



More often though, a leader must develop it. One of the most effective ways to do so are regularly scheduled, honest, direct, formal counseling sessions. These are one on one meetings where a leader provides feedback to a direct report on their behavior and performance. Leaders share their thoughts both verbally and in writing on that team member's embodiment of the organization's Core Values and their consistency in meeting and exceeding the daily standards that reinforce those Core Values. Next, the leader discusses that team member's performance in every aspect and in all areas of their job. In short, are they doing what they were hired to do, and at what level? Throughout, the leader provides suggestions (and encourages their subordinate to do so as well) so they improve in both areas.

Counseling sessions should occur at regularly scheduled intervals (semi- annually is recommended). It allows both the leader and their subordinate an opportunity to prepare for them. It also allows for a more relaxed environment during the meeting; on many teams, individuals only receive formal counseling when they did something wrong or are, in fact, getting fired. Most importantly, consistent counseling sessions provide a means of tracking progress. For sustained success, perfection is both unrealistic and unnecessary, but consistent growth and improvement is mission critical. Counseling sessions help ensure it.

They do require both a time and emotional investment though. Many leaders, rather than consistently making *this* investment, instead consistently focus their efforts on changing *how* they do what they do: recruiting procedures, sales practices, marketing efforts etc. This should occur regularly too, but only after investing in the *who*, their people. Unfortunately, many leaders either do not conduct formal counseling sessions or render them worthless by providing subordinates with only "everyone is exceptional," platitudes. This is the first of the three mistakes mentioned earlier. Instead, make open, honest, formal counseling sessions standard within your organization.

Second, a leader is 100% responsible for developing their subordinates, but so too are the subordinates. After receiving counseling, a subordinate must behave and perform better. If not or should their improvement be slow, inconsistent, or simply not to an acceptable level, a change should take place in either their role on the team, or possibly even in their remaining a member of it. Not doing so hurts the team.

However, many leaders share a deep personal relationship with their coworkers. They have typically known and collaborated with each other for years, and shared numerous personal and professional hardships and successes. Often, on many teams, spouses and even children are good friends. Further, speaking from personal experience, being demoted, or fired is painful. Also speaking from personal experience, demoting, or firing someone is exceedingly painful too.



When this occurs though, it is not a failure in leadership. Allowing someone to remain in a role that they are unsuited or remain a member of your team who should not, is. Often because of personal relationships and how difficult it is, leaders allow it. This is the second mistake. Instead, have courage. Make this incredibly difficult decision for the good of your team and all the individuals who are earning the right to be a part of it.

Finally, it is a leader's responsibility to define *best* and then to consistently counsel their subordinates so they might attain it. Leaders should reward those who do and implement consequences for those who do not. Consistently. Not just when the leaves change color. Not just when they are forced to "fix it." A mistake is not necessarily that members of a staff are demoted or fired after numerous losing seasons or when a company is barely surviving financially. The third mistake is having waited until then to do so.

As Jack Welch points out, change before we *have* to. Instead, do so both when we are coming off a losing season and a championship one, or upon completion of a financially disappointing year in business and an equally, incredibly successful one. Grow. Get better. Conduct regularly scheduled counseling sessions. Provide benefits for those who improve their behavior and performance, and consequences for those who do not. Make tough decisions. Doing so is in the best interest of the team. Your team.

Always remember it.

Now let's Attack 2022!

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