



“Isn’t it interesting that no matter what the sport, or business for that matter, outstanding coaches seem to consistently win championships or lead successful companies”

COACHING LEADERSHIP – LEVEL 10 LEADERSHIP

We sometimes see average or better than average technical coaches who have played a fair amount of hockey, who are quite personable, and who are liked by the players and parents, unable to reach the highest levels in the standings or win key playoff or championship games. This is so even though the players on their teams have at least equal or better physical and mental skills compared with the opposition’s and the coach appears to have a reasonable plan. Why is this?

We also sometimes see good technical coaches going into key playoff or championship games asking for or even demanding 110% effort from “their” teams, particularly in pre-game speeches. Then we see the team go out and play somewhat lack luster, not up to its potential and unable to play consistently well enough to win. The coach’s words don’t seem to impact the players’ performance levels. Why is this?

The answer in both of the above situations and in many others where teams that should win but don’t win key games may be the lack of one or more elements of Level 10 coaching leadership.

On the other hand, we also see some teams winning championships and finishing high in the standings that shouldn’t really be winning as much given the quality of their players compared with those of their opponents. People are left scratching their heads asking “How did they do that?”

We also see some teams with players who improve dramatically over the course of a season and play their best in key games at the end of the season. People wonder “how was that achieved”?

Again, the answer from my experience in hockey and business is likely Level 10 coaching leadership. Somehow the players were able to play up to their potential or in some cases beyond their normal capabilities?

So what is Level 10 coaching leadership anyway? What do coaches have to do to achieve this level? How do you create the environment for excellence and overachievement? What are the characteristics of Level 10 leaders?

There have been many books written in the business, political and sports environments about excellent leadership and coaching.

In my opinion from my experience, there is no one key ingredient, or even a few ingredients: it’s dozens of little and big things, some technical and some communicative, emotional or relationship type elements, adding up to some kind of special connection among the players themselves and the players and the coaches that words cannot explain. The players can’t wait to



overachieve. They are confident. They believe in the game plan, themselves, their team mates, the coaches and the team. They won't quit. They don't get too high when games are going well or too low when they are losing. They just soldier on with confidence and determination. They play every shift like it's 0 – 0 whether they are winning or losing. They feel their team mates' and coaches' desire for them to succeed and it fuels their desire. They can see it in everybody's eyes. They don't just talk, they do.

Characteristics of a Level 10 Leader:

- **Competent and Creative**
 - A student of the game, understands the game intimately (e.g. all aspects of TIPS like these), has played at high levels, has used individual, system and tactical plans that have worked, and can demonstrate these skills on the ice
 - Understands the value of strong defensive, opportunistic and reasonable risk hockey
 - Analytical, very organized and logical thinker
 - Identifies the weaknesses of the opposition's players and tactics, communicates them to the players before and during games and exploits them for the benefit of the team
 - Assesses individual and team mental and physical skill sets and system performance strengths and weaknesses subjectively through observation, and objectively through game stats and other means
 - Creates effective player units so that the players' unequal skill sets complement one another
 - Creates action plans including practice drills and off ice learning sessions to improve individual and team weaknesses
 - Visionary – thinks outside the box
 - Common Sense
 - Knows he doesn't know everything about hockey - a continuous learner always looking for new ways to improve, not set in his ways



- Seeks outside specialized help if needed e.g. skills, systems, goaltending, fitness training

- **Change Manager/Communicator**
 - Good teacher, communicator and negotiator - understands gradual learning and performance change processes and the value of continuous reinforcement
 - Is a good people manager (players, coaches, parents)
 - Defines team and individual goals with input from the players
 - Treats players with respect, not authoritatively
 - Cares how the players feel and is constantly seeking their feedback
 - Helps players when they are down on their game to remain positive, be patient and to find ways to improve
 - Individualizes his relationship with each player
 - Listens more than he talks
 - Sits down with players and talks with them about their game, their questions and what they think
 - Is “one of the guys” but not “one of the guys” at the same time – he does not separate himself as an authority figure – not “you” but rather “we” in everything
 - Understands the connections between effective teaching - personal relationships - humor - having fun with the players
 - Understands the value of player self assessment and learning through the players watching game videos and talking about their performance improvements

- **Likable and Charismatic**
 - Is liked and trusted by the players even though they find him demanding



- The players feel proud to have a coach like him
- Sometimes he does not have to speak and they know how he feels
- Demonstrates controlled intensity and excitement on the bench during games
- Humble, and somewhat shy, but strong
- High energy
- Open
- **Character and Courage**
 - Admits his mistakes openly
 - Is fiercely and constructively competitive within the rules
 - Really cares about the team and the players as people and the players know that
 - Puts the team ahead of himself and individual players
 - Lets the players take the credit
 - Never centres out a player in front of the team or demeans the team
 - Believes in fair play, clean play or no play
 - Will make difficult decisions or suggestions to help the team even if not popular with players or parents
 - Quietly confident and tenacious
 - Disciplined and tireless worker
 - Respects the opposition, referees, and the associations they represent
 - Never would ask a player to contribute more than he would expect of himself
 - Doesn't buckle under pressure and gets stronger in the clutch or in losing streaks



- **Positive Thinker**
 - Identifies players' strengths and builds on them
 - Accentuates the positive first when trying to correct a weakness to enhance receptivity and motivation
 - Paints a positive results picture conditional on smart hard work following the game plan, particularly in close games or when the team is losing
 - Adapts tactics for less talented players in accordance with their skill sets so that they together can strengthen the team

There will be other factors you will think of in addition to the above. Let's apply them consistently and become the leaders the players deserve and can use as a role model inside and outside of hockey.