



Lessons in leadership from... Sir Clive Woodward

Our series on leadership continues this month with one of England's greatest sporting leaders: Sir Clive Woodward.

Jyoti Shah Series Editor

As a player, Sir Clive Woodward was a strikingly balanced runner who had speed, guile and a sense of adventure. As a coach, he left an indelible impression on history by steering England to its first-ever Rugby World Cup victory in 2003.

Sir Clive started his rugby career playing for Harlequins in 1974, followed by Leicester in 1979. He continued to play professional rugby throughout the 1980s and was renowned as a player with a propensity for suppressing his own need for glory in the interests of the team; an admirable and rare quality in team sports.

He then left to play and coach in Australia, but it was inevitable that he would come back to England, and he did – initially returning to coach Henley from obscurity into the national leagues, then serving spells as coach of London Irish and Bath, before taking on the England job and turning them into the No 1-ranked team in the world and guiding them to World Cup success. Shortly after the

World Cup win, Sir Clive was knighted for his services to rugby.

SO WHAT LED TO HIS SUCCESS AS A COACH?

When he first started coaching England, Sir Clive could see no reason why they could not win. 'Question everything and take everyone with you,' he said as he set about challenging traditional rugby principles and applying business practices instead. He has plenty of business experience, having worked for Xerox and subsequently running his own successful finance and leasing company.

He believes in hard work and a concept called 'teamship': 'Great teams are made up of great individuals', he says. Every player should be treated as an individual to earn their trust and respect. 'You don't have to be friends with everyone, but you must have that bond and respect.'

Sir Clive was known for being different from other coaches and fiercely loyal to his

players. When the team toured South Africa and were booked into what he believed was a substandard hotel, he paid for the team to stay in a five-star hotel. He discovered that Sir Steve Redgrave, winner of five rowing gold medals in five consecutive Olympic Games, spent more time and effort on individual development than on team development. Redgrave was therefore brought in to coach each player to focus on being the best in their role.

Sir Clive set a high standard of discipline and had teamship rules to which everyone had to sign up. Players had to be smart at all times, were banned from swearing in public and mobile phones were only allowed in the players' rooms. A fiercely punctual man himself, Sir Clive asked that his players adhere to 'Lombardi time', insisting – like legendary Green Bay Packers coach Vince Lombardi – that players arrive ten minutes early and be in their seats for any pre-arranged meeting.

Players were asked not to make public what went on inside the camp and articles or books that might offend a colleague were banned. Players who were not selected had to congratulate their replacement, and any dissent was dealt with by the team using their own appointed 'governors'. These team representatives liaised with Sir Clive and he realised that he had cracked team communication when the team approached him with ideas,

problems and solutions for discussion. As for Sir Clive, he always listened, however young or junior the player. 'You must listen to them,' he tells *the Bulletin*.

Sir Clive spent his student years as captain of the rugby team at Loughborough, where he graduated with a sports science degree, followed by a Postgraduate Certificate in Education. Although the former was useful, it did not give him the winning edge.


However, the teaching side of his education 'has been hugely helpful in teaching me communication skills,' he says.

LEADERSHIP LESSONS

'No one has the automatic right to be respected as a leader just because they carry the title,' he insists, and 'talent alone is not enough'. Sir Clive's essential leadership toolkit can be summarised as follows:

'A "sponge" soaks up information and has a passion for their subject, whereas a "rock" does not absorb new knowledge and instead adopts a "know-it-all-attitude". The latter weighs down any team.'



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1. The team must be in complete agreement with any decision – 100% and not just the majority. This meant that the team met without Sir Clive and agreed on a decision that was then recommended to him. Using this strategy, the team members had complete ownership of the recommended decision and, once this was made, no further negotiations were allowed.
 2. Sir Clive believes that capturing and sharing knowledge is crucial to success. His players had to know everything about their chosen discipline but also had to hunger to learn more. He talked about ‘sponges and rocks’ in the team; a ‘sponge’ soaks up information and has a passion for their subject, whereas a ‘rock’ does not absorb new knowledge and instead adopts a ‘know-it-all-attitude’. The latter weighs down any team and he believes that people often drift into becoming rocks as they get older.
 3. Question everything – what, why, how and how well. Winning moves (the what) are why something works. Then question how it can be improved. Finally, data is key. Understanding how the team will be measured and who will use the data is vital.
 4. Sir Clive believes that ‘winners perform at their very best when the pressure is at its greatest.’ Individuals need a warrior spirit and this can be harnessed in the ‘war room’, where all possible scenarios are practised and rehearsed through ‘role play, after role play, after role play,’ he says. Leaders must put their teams under pressure at all times, and he implemented the acronymous T-CUP methodology. Thinking Correctly Under Pressure in the war room allows hypothetical situations to be played out under time pressure so that the team is conferred an advantage by being prepared for all eventualities. By going through the thought processes, the chances of coming up with something unexpected are reduced.

Sir Clive described the example of the last two-and-a-half minutes of the 2003 World Cup match to illustrate how the team acted under an incredibly pressurised situation. At this stage in the game, the score was tied at

Who do you think is a great leader and why?

Sir Alex Ferguson.

I like people who have longevity in what they do and are prepared to take risks and challenge authority.

Sir Clive's five favourite things

1. Family
2. Good health
3. Staying fit
4. Sports – especially Chelsea
5. Golf

17 apiece and by rehearsing every possible scenario, the team was mentally prepared for the ultimate prize – the Webb Ellis Cup. Sir Clive believes these skills can be transferred to any situation to maximise success.

Another lesson he valued as coach was asking friends and colleagues from other professions to spend 24 hours with him on the job. There was one condition: by the time they left, they had to give Sir Clive one idea of something that could be improved.

THE LAST WORD

‘Knowledge is know-how. Successful teams plan for failure. What are you going to do when things go wrong? If you don’t plan for failure, then you can freeze.’

Sir Clive Woodward
in his playing days

Coming up next time... Niall Dickson