

A LEADING QUESTION...



The media regularly criticise teams for not having enough leaders on the pitch. But that begs the questions of 'what makes a good leader?' and 'how should good leaders be developed?'

We asked these questions of recently retired Chair of the RPA Management Board, Vic Luck, who knows a bit about the subject, from his days in charge of the £6bn global business of PwC Consulting and his present role as Director of the Foundation for Leadership through Sport (www.flSPORT.net).



VIC'S 11 LEADERSHIP STEPS

1 Put simply, leadership is about directly influencing others to achieve group goals. But it becomes complicated when in complex organisations and fast moving environments; and because it's dealing with peoples' varying emotions.

2 Leadership is executed in many different situations - in sport, in business, in the Armed Forces, and in public service. The task at hand will vary, as will the skills, values and expectations of those being led; so the capabilities, style and approach of the leader need to fit the circumstances.

3 It's rather like golf: so simple at one level, but tricky to execute well. Aspiring leaders, like golfers, are hungry to learn the secrets of success. A whole industry has developed in leadership education, estimated at nearly \$50 billion a year worldwide and more than 2000 new books are published on the subject each year. As with golf, this can all make for confusing and conflicting advice on how to master leadership. Here's my view (but don't take my advice on golf!).

4 I don't subscribe to there being a set of 'personal qualities' that mark out 'good leaders', which can readily be adopted. Situations, tasks, organisational culture (apologies for mentioning the 'c word') vary too much for there to be a generic answer.

5 I'm more for taking each aspiring leader and helping them understand the impact they have on others. This pinpoints where they can improve; one of the few common characteristics of good leaders is that they are both very self-aware and tuned to the emotions of others ('emotional intelligence').

6 But it is useful to understand the components of the leaders job, so as to focus on what's important to get right. There are many models to help, and I use one for getting feedback on a leaders impact, which embraces how well the person: reads the task situation; makes decisions; communicates direction; uses resources; maintains trust and team spirit; keeps the team focused.

7 We all lead, each time we make a decision or influence our teammates to act in a particular way. When we have the ball, our decision on where to run or pass is 'leadership'. So team performance will benefit from everybody developing their leader skills; gone are the days of seeing leadership as being down to 'one great man'.

8 Those who lead more than others, do so either because of their rank (e.g. captain, Chief Executive, line-out caller) or because others trust their judgement on things that matter (winning as a team, survival under enemy attack, personal career progress etc.) and see them as a role model. Track-record as a winning leader who gets it right and can be trusted to deliver on promises is a strong attraction for followers.

9 Whilst we all have varying innate ability, the vast majority of us have the potential to grow our leadership skills to make the most of our talent; that's no different to other aspects of sports skills.

10 The best way of developing leaders is to provide experience of leadership in increasingly challenging workplace roles, enhancing self-awareness of capabilities and impact on others. Having the drive and a plan to improve, reflecting on feedback and honing skills through practice are the keys to success, as with sports skills. The often quoted concept of '10,000 hours' of practice to achieve mastery applies to leadership as much as to kicking goals.

11 Organisations and teams sustain success because they develop and appoint a succession of leaders who have proven capabilities and a style to meet the needs of the situation and values involved. They don't leave leadership development to chance, any more than strength and conditioning would not be coached intensively.

The RPA Personal Development Programme (PDP) offers support on leadership to clubs and players. PDMs can access advice and expertise on various approaches to meet the needs for accelerating the development of leaders, for immediate team performance improvement and for longer term career development. Through the RPA, members can develop as leaders both on and off the pitch by enrolling in the BA (Hons) Leadership and Management degree (BALM) at Northumbria University. RPA members can apply by contacting Mandy Thompson on 07889 601 709 or mthompson@theRPA.co.uk