

## CREATING DIAMONDS OR DESTROYING DREAMS

By Neil Hull

### HOW PRESSURE CAN DESTROY YOUR CHOSEN COACHING STYLE FROM TRANSFORMATIONAL TO TRANSACTIONAL IN LESS THAN A SEASON:

- Why we lose our team?
- Why we lose our dressing room?

#### DESTROYING DREAMS

John Gordon talks of water as a transformational catalyst; place a hard carrot in boiling water and it will turn soft, put an egg in boiling water, it will turn hard, a coffee bean in boiling water will transform the waters' flavor, taste and appearance. Managed Pressure can be the catalyst to transformational servant-based leadership or ill-managed the incendiary reactant to autocratic transactional leadership.

**OBJECTIVE:** Over the next few paragraphs, through sourced referenced examples, I would like to observationally discuss and challenge how external, third party, emotional or physical pressure can modify our coaching behavior, mindset, perception and actions thereof.

The image I am not trying to transfer is one of the Incredible Hulk! A mass visual green external change of body, through the medium of impulse anger. (Although some might witness this metaphorically!) I'm looking to discuss more of an internal change of mind. Looking into how a coach's positive traits of a caring, sharing, listening, or being a player's mentor can mind morph into a controlling, directing, impatient, cynical, sarcastic coach; all in less than a season. Reflection, self-awareness and emotional intelligence (EQ), used correctly are leadership tools which can transform confidence and trust. When disregarded they can deepen the hole of anxiety, fear, doubt and skepticism. EQ can be defined as the regulation of one's state, the foundation to critical thinking. (Bradberry & Greaves: Emotional Intelligence 2). The transformational leader has 'iron clad' regulation of their state and emotions. Contrastingly the transactional leader often unknowingly displays their power and control directly (emotionally, verbally and physically through their body language.)

**CULTURE:** Ultimately our culture is what happens within 10 paces of ourselves (JP Nerbun). Measured by the way we look to catch players in, and not catch players out, or according to USWNT head coach Tony DiCicco 'catch them being good'. Struggling teams are often defined by dysfunctional cultures. Through these dysfunctional cultures, coaches and players will often struggle to hear the messages offered, said and received. These messages expressed not by how they are said, but how they are heard. Author of 'Calling Up', J P Nerbun, describes a culture as the unwritten rules perceived through the environment. External pressures: Scores, sponsors, management etc. can challenge the internal values of a culture.



This pressure can disrupt the message. When a coach's trust or delivery breaks down frustration grows and the coach tends not to hear or be heard as deeply. A direct environment where 2-way feedback loses its value.

**TRUST:** For feedback to be effective, the giver must ideally gain permission from the receiver to accept it (PDS Coaching). Brenne Brown, author of *Dare To Lead*, states 'if you're not in my arena, why would I want to listen?' The transformational coach connects and creates positive relationships by regularly investing in his players 'trust bank', (Daniel Coyle: *Culture Code*), knowing one day there may be a withdrawal. By building these transformational relationships



through continual trust and clarity and not destroying them with fear, shame, insults nor accusations, (tools of the transactional coach). When pressure tests this values-based culture it will survive the truth. Even when the honest, sometimes brutal, truth is heard. As a transformational coach, our culture becomes the immune system of our team, giving us a competitive advantage or force multiplier. If through pressure we lose sight of our agreed values and vision, our leadership style, often due to controllable or uncontrollable pressure, can transactionally change becoming more authoritative and autocratic. Through these actions the cultural competitive advantage fractures, clicks form, sides are taken and the culture is tested from within. The dressing room is lost! Leadership bonds of trust are broken. We are no longer a team of teams.

Players don't quit their teams they quit their coach! You can observe this through professional, collegiate and club sports. At the lower levels players will just leave their sport for no explained reason. Through experience, I've had players leave my teams, cold. Over many years of coaching I have evolved learnt to ask myself why? Utilizing various techniques of self-reflection, surveys and personal communication with lost players. Retrospectively, I can understand how transactional and direct I was at the time. My governance of the team was a 'my way or the highway' style. I gave them a choice (transaction) and they took it! "You need to pick your game up or I will bench you!" "If we cannot keep possession for more than three passes, we will have laps" "You might as well go home, if you are not going to try". Simon Sinek, through his teachings, looks to create a transformational environment of solving problems, not putting transactional band aids on solutions. For example, in a professional soccer team, a successful manager might be removed from a team, when the real problem is not the manager, but a behavioral culture he is trying to solve within the team. The boardroom leadership witnesses the external result-based outcomes of the scoreboard, so they transactionally remove the manager and replace him for someone with a better solution. Meanwhile, the manager needed the time to solve the problem. To transform the behavior of the people who were responsible for those results. Maya Angelo once said: "People will forget what you said or did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Through the transactional leadership of the board, the coach has gone, the team is dysfunctional, the culture is toxic and the incoming coach has all the 'old' new problems. Think Manchester United post Sir Alex Ferguson, Chelsea 2008 post Jose Mourinho. Success does not make someone a leader, exhibiting the qualities of leadership, makes a leader (Sinek). Both Ferguson and

Mourinho proved their success, measured by their trophy cabinets! Through their careers they transacted through the 'dressing room' Ferguson famously with Beckham and Mourinho with his board. One knew when to lead give and let go, the other to control, transact and be relieved.

**RECOGNITON:** Imagine the picture, the coach has invested a massive amount of time and sweat equity preseason: Planning, preparing, recruiting; the team is there! They have sold the story of greatness to all the players preseason, prepared, enthusiastic and ready to cross the white line. The initial energy given by the coaches on the field is powerful and positively emotional. The players are buying into the beginning of this new dream. As the weeks move forward small things change, ability, cultural, and character clicks form within the team. Clicks form too, within the coaching staff. Coaches start to coach not what they see, but what they imagine. Pressure grows as the players struggle to understand agreed concepts and perceived outcomes. The coaches battle to get through the planned session, because the players just don't get it! The players are slow, and keep failing at the simplest actions with little or no process, self-correction, individual or team accountability. The coaching staff have a meeting and agree:

They need to take control of this! They start to lead all the questions, and begin to answer their own silence. If a player does not understand a coaching point, or fails to manufacture a perceived coached outcome, then the coach offers 'suicides' as a memory moment! The coaching staff communicate outcomes only with each other, they set the player's standards and what the players need to know. Their pathway to the players success. After a few weeks of this, the coaches are achieving



their joint vision of success, however the players are tired, stressed, always on time, but fearful of team selection. The performance outcomes have raised and are at a satisfactory level. Together the coaches have regained their effective control of the program, they have created an environment they, the coaching staff, can gain results from. Maintain it through the use of positive punishment, rewarding the losing teams or players with extra fitness. Through this transactional environment the coach has won back his team! Or has she?

Can you spot the one word defining the coaching staff's success? .....Satisfactory. The coaches have their program, training plan and their culture back! At what price? What have they gained? A bunch of R2D2's & C3PO's who will perform at a satisfactory level, when programmed. How could this be different? Let's break it down and ask ourselves: Why do the small things change and clicks form? Possibly through both player and coach isolation and exclusion. Gordon talks of 'Energy vampires', sucking the life out of a team. Damien Hughes explains how 'Cultural Assassins' quietly undermine the culture bit by bit. Cruyff states " You cannot be successful and have people play the victim". How about creating an inclusive team, where your team mates bring out a fight of accountability in you, you cannot willingly summon yourself? Mark Bennett of PDS Coaching asks this question: "Do you want your players to be self-managing, self-thinking people, who are able to adapt live to the situation? Who are



relentless, can manage their own state while independently thinking? All whilst being effective communicators; Players who make decisions and will accept feedback from self and team mates? All this without the need for a coach?" Wow, yes please!

### CREATING DIAMONDS.

**RESOLUTION:** Transform the ownership of your team, jointly. Our culture and leadership are formed through the agreed teams' and coaching staff's joint core values and the pathway to their agreed joint vision. Note the word agreed, we spoke earlier to feedback and how the receiver requires 'agreed permission' for the feedback to be accepted. Our internal voice expresses: "The players just don't get it!" Why? Wooden said: "You haven't taught, until they have learned". We as coaches have to be empathetic, not autocratic, to the needs of all our players.

To support the coaches and clarity of their joint message, we all need to be on the same



page....of the same book. How do we achieve this? How many of us plan our sessions with a final content area for reflection of self and team, on a given criteria from the written objectives of the session? If we do, do we utilize this information when planning and preparing for the next session? Or do we just pick up with the next session in the curriculum? Even worse use the same session with the same objectives for multiple teams? How do we know if the ideas and knowledge of the previous sessions imprinted on our players? "You haven't taught, until they have learned". A possible way to achieve this is starting at the point where we finished, the last session. We give the game to the players and we, the coaches, stand back scan and observe for previous successful objectives. Not coach, guide nor question, just observe. If we see hear or sense it's there,

recognize it, celebrate it!. Now it's time to move on. If not, we need to search out why the previous sessions have not been effective.

They say he who controls the vocabulary, controls the conversation. External and internal pressure can lead a behavioral change. From once transformational, pressured now through the lack of effective communication, to a more strained transactional direct controlling style. Through this period a coach's language can change, along with the delivery and reception of their messages. The shifting of their stated word and body language. Replacing its style from positive, empowered, discovery, challenging and understanding; to an animated, aggressively pointing, impatient, mistake seeking and direct quick one-way correction, etc. The invested traits of the recently transformational coach crushed. Coaching commands now begin to take away the voice of their players. Their leaders pose questions, then before the end of the short silence, self-answer with their resolution . Confiscating the language and ownership of the player's choice. The player willing to conform and remain dependable, chooses the decision given to her (transacts). She then makes a mistake, for which she is held accountable, but does not own. The real owner (coach) then blames, sometimes even shames, the player for the

incorrect action or decision, often in front of her peers. Once or twice the player or team forgive, as pressure grows, so do the habits and behaviors connected with it. The player(s) will start to play in fear rather than fun, their game, decision making and effort soon reflecting.

When you select your choice, you self- motivate your solution. Transformational leaders will give the player the time (space), opportunity, ownership and trusted feedback. Jointly, they share the language, vision of success and its pathway. They mentor the person first, as a self-leader and not the player: Gaining a double W-I-N (what's important now – Brenne Brown). Its not about being weak or giving up responsibility, its about strength of character and trusting in the joint values of culture you created. A challenge environment is better than a threat culture. 'Be a success seeker, rather than a failure avoider' -Unknown

As internal and external pressure defines the evolution of the coach's new environment (for better or worse) he models an illustration not only to his players, but to impressionable staff members. Blending in, the coaching staff's behavior may unknowingly start to mirror their leaders, assimilating into their new 'click'.

The transformational and transactional behaviors of the coach could be correlated to the growth or fixed mindset as described by Dweck. Effort is a value to transform their pathway to success, not fix nor focus on the consequence of the outcome. The transactional coach will confront his or her players setting their limits and standards. Meanwhile the transformational coach will offer challenges to grow her player's unlimited potential finding where their passion and purpose intersect. Through these agreed challenges the player will own and become accountable to the process. Versus the transactional coach confronting his players, telling his players what they should do for the required outcome. The coach then holds the player accountable for his decisions. When the player struggles or fails to achieve them, the coach frantically blames the player for the action or the decision that the coach has chosen for them! Everyone loses!!

The transactional coach lives in the environment of blame and outcome, the one person whom she or he does not blame is..... themselves. Often the last person we see is the person in the mirror. Performance psychologists will class this awareness regulation of self as emotional intelligence (EQ). We coach our team, why not use the same standards or criteria to coach ourselves? We video our team and break it down, why not video ourselves? Utilize self-evaluation through a specific awareness-criteria of: State, choices, effective communication, regulation and behavior, for a start!

I believe through experience and observation; this 'change' happens because we are too close to the game, both literally and mentally. We are trying to be the control freak, rather than the influential empowering leader. We stand upon the white line and lean in, the commanding leader, rather than the player's inspiration, forcing our decisions over guiding players' to chose their own. We have to let go. Empowering, trusting and teaching our players to own and be



accountable to the transformation of their game.

Pressure channeled correctly, can create diamonds. Understanding behavior is not the same as excusing it.

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#### Source List

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Brenne Brown – Dare to Lead

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