

# Coaching the Team – What's Management's Role?

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## *Abstract*

You manage a lot of individuals and are responsible for a number of key teams. How do teams differ from individuals? What's the best you can expect from a team? The winning team of Super Bowl XXXVI teaches us some lessons.

Managers often talk about teams that are not teams. But when they are referring to real teams – small groups of people who have a clear objective and lots of room to make decisions – they legitimately have high expectations. In order not to be disappointed by the teams we create in our organizations, we need to know what a successful team's operation and output look like.

We can learn something about this from the New England Patriots. In achieving their upset victory over the St. Louis Rams in this year's Super Bowl, the Patriots demonstrated a number of key team values and principles.

## **Super Bowl XXXVI and the New England Patriots**

As the Patriots strode onto the field before the national anthem. Something was missing. That something was the pregame introductions.

The St. Louis Rams held true to professional decorum, unveiling the starters on their offense one by one. The Patriots bypassed the normal way of doing things, declining the traditional introductions that cater to individualism. For the Patriots, it was simple -- jump together in the inflatable tunnel, then run on the field as one.

**"The players wanted to do it that way; they wanted to come out as a team,"** Belichick said."

He and his coaches had long ago taught these Patriots about the value of functioning as a team. "That's the reason we won," Belichick said. "Because we played the game as a team."

When others might have panicked, he focused on the moment at hand, because he knew the focus of a head coach's job -- to turn individuals into

a team. And because Belichick did that successfully, he's now the head coach of a world champion team.

-- from an article by Andrew Mason, *NFL.com*

**"I've never been so proud to be a member of anything in my life,"** Adam Vinatieri said.

After the game, Robert Kraft, owner of the Patriots, reflected on the Patriots' organization and recipe for success.

"It's nice when you have an ownership, administration, a coaching staff, and players **all on the same page**," Kraft said. "I think the record speaks for itself.

Despite not playing a down in the Patriots' first Super Bowl victory, nine-year veteran Drew Bledsoe remained gracious and, patriotic to the team and Brady.

"I am proud to be a part of this team," Bledsoe said. "This whole season has been about playing as a team. **I know my role, and I do my part to support my team.**"

-- from an article by Tim Polzer, *NFL Insider*

A team called the Patriots turned this into the greatest Super Bowl of them all. They did it by coming up with a masterful defensive game plan and an **amazing display of heart and resilience** that has defined their entire season.

And the difference is **this was a game that the winning team decided on its own** rather than benefiting from the opponent's failure.

-- from an article by Vic Carucci, *NFL Insider*

## What can we learn from the Patriots?

1. *The players wanted to do it that way; they wanted to come out as a team.*

When a group works together successfully as a team, the individuals identify with the team and want recognition to come to the team as a whole. This does not mean that the individuals don't want to be rewarded, but it does mean that they expect to be rewarded as a team for their team efforts and results.

2. *focused on the moment at hand*

The way to turn a group of individuals into a team is to get each of them to focus on the team's work of the moment – and to exclude everything else for the time they are working as a team. No matter what other responsibilities a team member has, he or she must give supremacy to the team's work during team work time. This will happen naturally after the team has completed its formative work, as long as management and support organizations do not interfere with the process.

### *3. all on the same page*

Success of a team depends not only on the coalescence of the team members as a working group, but also the alignment of management, staff, and support functions. Everyone involved in the team's activities and results needs to be on the same page – in agreement about the objectives and the process of the team's work. Conflict within the team must be managed by the team. But conflict between the team and its management or between the team and its support organizations must be resolved by management action. Before taking action, however, make sure that the charter to the team does not contain inherent conflict – directions which do not agree with values or objectives of other parts of the organization.

4. *I've never been so proud to be a member of anything in my life ;*

*I know my role, and I do my part to support my team.*

Membership is more than an assignment. Successful team members commit themselves to the well-being of the team and do whatever it takes to make the team succeed. Just as recognition and reward is best directed at the whole team, selection of team role (not function, but role) is best left to the team to decide.

5. *amazing display of heart and resilience*

*this was a game that the winning team decided on its own*

A well-functioning team is capable of amazing feats. They do not see limits in what they can do, because a synthesis of talent and drive from the group produces capabilities that exceed any one team member's limitations. The resulting team actions are driven not by fear of failure but by a vision of success. Allow the team to define its vision of success before applying your own, because you may be surprised by the scope the team chooses to call its own.

**High-Tech teams make it happen** Launching a new business, product, development project, or technology program, requires a well-functioning team to succeed. A non-producing team costs lost executive time, investment dollars, market opportunity, loss of strategic position, and participant burnout.

**Jim Collins, in his book "Good to Great," tells us that great companies confront the brutal facts, create a climate where the truth is heard, and never lose faith that they can succeed.**

**John Levy Consulting helps you find out the facts - and deal with them to get results from your teams.**

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**John V. Levy, Principal of John Levy Consulting LLC, brings**

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clear communications with executives  
a natural rapport with technologists –  
    Ph.D. in computer science  
    broad scientific & technical interests  
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