

Lessons from Lombardi: Not Just for Football Anymore

by Steve Williams

Old School = New School

It occurred to me after reading an article in a local paper recently that solid management fundamentals are timeless and cross all industries. It is critical that an organization have a foundation based on a practical management game plan to be in the chase for excellence.

The article, [Would Vince Lombardi be successful in today's NFL?](#), written by sportswriter Gary D'Amato, appeared in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, a politically skewed newspaper for which I have no particular fondness. However, the sports reporting has always been very good. In my home state of Wisconsin, the mere mention of Saint Vinny generally elicits a reverent hush, recollections of legendary Packer moments, and the occasional genuflection from the old timers. For those of you with your football heads in the sand, [Vincent Thomas Lombardi](#) built one of the greatest dynasties in sports history in the 1960s, about 90 miles north of my home. Vince would have been 100 years old on June 11, 2013.

The article noted the facts that NFL players today are bigger, stronger and faster, and that the offensive and defensive schemes were a magnitude more complicated than in Vince's day. Also discussed was just how modern players, especially "me generation" football divas like Terrell Owens, Randy Moss, Jay Cutler, and Chad Ochocinco Johnson, would react to Lombardi's demanding, no excuses, and winning-is-everything coaching style. The answer is that Vince Lombardi would most certainly be not only successful today, but I would bet a boatload of beer that he could lead a modern-day team to a world championship. How is this possible? Because Lombardi's success was built on the foundation of fundamentals: hard work, discipline, flawless execution and the pursuit of building blocks of excellence that never go out of style.

Looking at the lessons of Lombardi's success, it is clear that his philosophy is not football, or even sports-centric, but applies to any business, organization, service and industry that is will-



[The New York Times](#)/Associated Press.

ing to embrace it. I challenge you to step out of your “Lombardi is football” mentality and take a fresh look at what can be learned from the legend and applied to your business.

Lessons from Lombardi

It's About Winning

Lombardi saw the importance of winning in any game—in life and so on. He couldn't accept defeat as final and he had a single-minded focus when it came to winning football games. As a leader, it is important to understand that people want to be part of a winning team, which requires a winning attitude. Lead by example; be positive while at the same time persistent. In whatever thing you want to do, there will be resistance and you need that winning attitude to break through and reach your team's goal.

What it Takes to be Number One

Lombardi famously stated “Winning is not a sometime thing; it's an all-the-time thing. You don't win once in a while; you don't do things right once in a while; you do them right all the time.” This speaks to the culture of an organization, whether the organization is a football team or a printed circuit manufacturer. A winning culture is an attitude that needs to be lived and breathed by every single employee, every single day.

Outwork Everyone

Lombardi knew that the price of success was hard work, hard work, and more hard work. He lived and breathed it with his teams, and this discipline helped them win their championships. You cannot bypass hard work; hard work is the shortest path to success. Show your team the value of hard work by personal example; and as you lead by hard work, your team will follow.

Teamwork is Essential

Lombardi recognized the importance of teamwork and he made sure each and every player understood that “there is no I in team.” There are many ways to say it: $2 + 2 = 5$; two heads are better than one; synergy. Lombardi

understood that teamwork was the only way to win, whether it was in the game, or in life.

KISS

Lombardi's Packers had only a handful of plays and none of them were overly complicated. He had no laminated cards, nor did his players have to flip over wrist bands listing dozens of plays with multiple options. However, the few plays that he did use were constantly and passionately enforced and practiced until it became second nature to every single player. Simplicity all but eliminated any misunderstandings and confusion so that everyone was on the same page.

Chase Perfection

Several former Packer players have described Lombardi's practice regime of running one rather simple offensive play dozens of times in a single practice until every individual player executed his assignment flawlessly. Over and over and over again, not a single mistake was overlooked or tolerated. Games were conducted in the same manner: Mistakes that weren't tolerated in a loss weren't tolerated in a win either. Lombardi's premise was that no team or individual has ever come even close to perfection by accident; the only chance of ever reaching perfection is to actively and constantly chase it.

Look in the Mirror

I would again challenge you to take a look at these lessons from Lombardi and find any one of these that doesn't, or shouldn't, apply to your organization. By the way, ESPN just voted Lombardi the [greatest coach in NFL history](#).

As the great Vince Lombardi once said, “Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence.” **PCB**



Steven Williams is the commodity manager for a large global EMS provider, and author of the book [Survival Is Not Mandatory: 10 Things Every CEO Should Know About Lean](#). To read past columns, or to contact the Williams, [click here](#).