

Good morning, everybody. Dennis Engelbrecht with The Family Business Institute, this session of Digging Deeper. I came in from out-of-town night before last and got a look at the mail and there was my Sports Illustrated. And those of you who know me, I'm a bit of a sports junkie. So, I look forward to my Sports Illustrated and I had a mixed reaction when on the cover was Coach K. Most of you probably know Coach K as he's the longtime basketball coach at Duke University, has the most wins of any coach in the history of college basketball, five national championships. And he happens to ply his practice about one mile from my home.

That said, my wife went to Carolina, so we tend to be more Carolina fans than Duke fans. But if you want to be a better leader, it would be hard to find, perhaps, a better example of leadership than Coach K. Certainly, he has accomplished much. And as I started reading this article, there were a couple of really fantastic gems in there that I think we all could learn from.

The first thing, and these were not statements from Coach K, these are about Coach K, but the first thing is a comment. And I think this is from one of his former players that his success did not come from his understanding of the X's and O's. It wasn't about the knowledge of how the game of basketball's played or the techniques or anything like that. His success, as these folks saw it, was in his ability to shape people into a team, right. His ability to shape people into a team. And now, of course, if you think about that, isn't that what we're all trying to do? It's what we're trying to do every day as leaders. And really if we have that ability to take people and shape them into a team, that's going to create success. It's going to create our own success, of course, as leaders.

So, a couple of the things that they talked about really hit me also. So, in his ability to shape people, he paid attention to a lot of little things, including the last man on the bench, for example, who even though they might not have a great impact on the game, they have impact on practice, and they have impact on the players after practice. That last man on the bench, I think, as he was quoted, might be the center of the social system of the team.

They also noted that he would be aware that the person playing the best might not be playing the hardest. Oh, yeah. That's an interesting thought. We might think about our superstar project manager, our superstar superintendent. Well, maybe they're getting you the best results, but maybe they're not setting the best examples in any number of other ways. So, even though they're playing their best, maybe there's still ways to help shape those folks into a better team.

The next thing they cited was he had the ability to know that if a player was struggling, whether they needed encouragement or whether they needed... They called it chewing out. But you might prefer in today's more politically correct world, applying some firmness or some accountability to the situation. So, does that person need encouragement? Do they need propping up or do they need their ego dressed down a little bit maybe to get a dose of reality?

And one of the stories they told, which really I thought was really cool and really neat, and if you're a sports fan, of course, you get a little bit of this star thing going on, but Coach K had the opportunity after the US lost at the Olympics a couple of times to come in and try to recreate a winning strategy, a winning feel, a winning culture for the US team in Olympic basketball. And on his team, he just happened to have two of the greats of all time, Kobe Bryant and LeBron James. Now, by this time, Kobe Bryant had been in the league about 10 years and LeBron James was only 23, but it was pretty obvious to everybody that he was going to be the new greatest of all time.

So, one of the interesting parts of both of those folks is they never played college basketball, so they never had experienced a college coach. So, this was now a team of professionals and Coach K was a college coach that was used to dealing with college athletes, and there was a lot of question marks about how he would do with these professional athletes. But kind of going back to his ability to shape people into a team, he did come in and he did approach the situation with a lot more deference than he might have for his college team. He came in asking questions and looking for support as opposed to dictating, setting rules, and things like that, et cetera.

So, one of his brilliant stretches was he decided that him or the coaching staff setting a bunch of rules for the team wasn't going to work. That they needed the team to set the rules and then have them bought into the standards they were going to play by, and learn by, and live by as they went on this journey toward a gold medal. So, he did speak to a couple of folks before that, including Kobe and lastly, LeBron. He let LeBron know that he was going to be asking for his feedback here.

So, as the story goes, this meeting went on and on and LeBron didn't say a thing. All right. He just sat in the corner listening, sometimes not that attentively, but wasn't saying a thing. And Coach K kept procrastinating in the meeting so it wouldn't end because he knew if he didn't hear from LeBron on what the standards were going to be, that he had the potential that people weren't going to buy into the standards. And lo and behold, finally LeBron did kick in. And after LeBron kicked in and I believe he said that these are the standards and coaches, we're going to live by these standards. "These are going to be our standards. And so, we're going to live by them." So that was a great thing and that had enough.

Now, they were in their final exhibition match and those of you who know Kobe Bryant know he did like to sort of takeoff offensively sometimes. And sometimes he'd even try to make the shots harder and harder, and they're playing their last exhibition game against Australia. And they're not looking like a dream team at all. And one of the reasons is that Kobe's decided to showboat a little bit during this game. And so, this wasn't good because coach was going to have to figure out how to deal with this.

So, LeBron came off the court, as the story goes, went by Coach K and looked at him and said, "You need to do something about that." An expletive deleted. And Coach K then knew the pressure was now on him. He had to have one of those chewing out sessions, if you will, with Kobe Bryant. And he did so. And of course, in doing so, he showed everybody else that they would have to be accountable.

And the way he did that... By the way, he did not chew him out. He just showed a film to him, asked Kobe what he noticed. And Kobe said, "Yeah, coach. I can see I was a problem there. It won't happen again." And then, of course, Coach K followed the loop, spoke to LeBron, let him know that Kobe had been talked to and the situation was handled. And of course, as the story goes, went on to win gold.

So, great lessons from Coach K. The big lesson there again is the ability to shape people into a team. And there was one statement in there. Every interaction matters. So, if you think of these last interactions with LeBron and Kobe, every interaction matters when you're a leader. So, think about that and hopefully you'll have success shaping your team.

Again, Dennis Engelbrecht, Digging Deeper, thanks for tuning in.