

Wrestling With Double Standards

Figure out what motivates your team members, then lead them accordingly.

Andy is a finishing department supervisor for a large custom coating operation. He is the kind of team member who won't quit. If his department needs 60 hours of his time in a given week, he works 70. His makeup is such that he can't let someone else down. It doesn't matter how challenging the order is, or how big the problem, Andy finds a way to get it done. At the same time, Andy's boss Steve gives him latitude. He doesn't criticize Andy's results or spend time pushing Andy to do more.

Jerry also reports to Steve. Jerry worked for a leading finishing chemical company before going to work for Steve's company. He has a reputation worldwide for his finishing knowledge. In a word, Jerry is important, and nobody reminds the team of that more often than Jerry does. But Jerry isn't a go-getter. He loves to play around in the lab and sit at the conference table discussing finishing technology, but when it comes to using his expertise to solve problems and add value, he struggles. Inconsistent with the freedom provided Andy, Steve meets with Jerry every morning to review what Jerry accomplished the day before and to set the agenda for the day, thus ensuring Jerry is focused.

Human nature being what it is, it wasn't long before Steve was accused of maintaining a double standard. It's not fair, Jerry contended, that Steve lets Jamie do whatever he wants with almost no direction, while Steve feels the need to micromanage Jerry. Such double standards, argued Terry, are signs of poor leadership. Rather than taking the bait by countering Terry's point, Steve concedes it. "Do I have double standards in the way I lead and motivate the individual members of the team?" he asks rhetorically. "Well, every member of the team is different, with diverse personalities, goals and motivators. Of course I have double standards."

We don't coach everyone the same, because everyone is not the same.

John Harms shares Steve's leadership and coaching philosophy—and Harms knows something

about coaching and teamwork. After a high school wrestling career that included three state champion titles, Harms went on to wrestle at the University of Wisconsin. While there, he was a four-year starter and letter winner, a three-year team captain, a two-time NCAA National Championship qualifier, a two-time Academic All-American and was ranked in the top four wrestlers in the country for most of his college career. Following his stint at UW, Harms assumed the head coaching position for the wrestling program at the University of Wisconsin – Platteville, a team that wound up dead last in its conference the year before recruiting Harms to coach. Under his leadership, the team finished third the following season behind the number one and number two programs in the entire country. To reiterate, Harms knows something about coaching and teamwork.

He and I recently compared notes over this whole issue of double standards. Interesting, in a way, that during our dialogue

Harms would point to Dan Gable, a coach of one of Wisconsin's arch-rivals, as an example of how double standards can work. Gable, among countless other accolades, a 1972 Olympic gold medalist, went on to coach the wrestling team at the University of Iowa, where over 21 years his teams won 15 NCAA titles, and where he coached 45 NCAA Champions, 152 All-Americans and 106 Big 10 Champions.

Three times he was named NCAA coach of the year. Like Harms, Gable knows something about coaching and teamwork.

"When you talk to the guys who wrestled for Gable, they tell you that he treated everyone differently," Harms said. "Some guys he would be right in the corner coaching the whole time; others he wouldn't be anywhere near them."

152 All-Americans, all coached differently. Interesting.

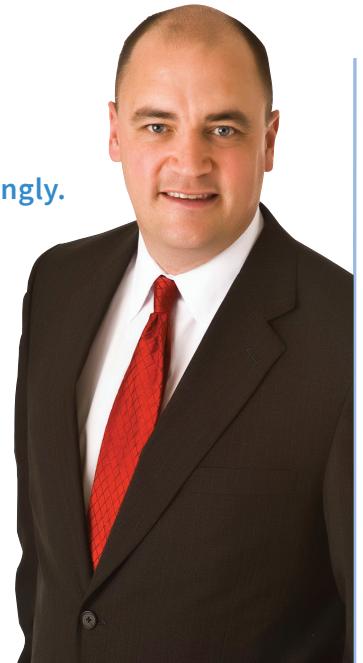
"Reflecting on my time as an athlete and a coach," Harms says, "coaching is about understanding the athlete's psyche. The coach must first understand what he's dealing with; understand what the athlete's triggers are and then coach to that style."

What about double standards? What if — as Harms suggests and Gable demonstrated — the key to coaching and leadership is understanding the mental state and personality traits of the individual being led, and then customizing a leadership style to that individual in a way that enables the leader to get the most of them and to assist them in accomplishing their goals?

So here's to double standards in leadership! Let the independent, self-motivated supervisor have his space, but check-up regularly on the lab tech who always seems to need an extra kick to stay focused on the task at hand.

Lavish praise on the social butterfly who thrives on positive feedback and hold back the same from the operations VP who couldn't care less if you compliment them or not. As for the human resource manager who can't say enough about their son's soccer accomplishments, take the time to stop by a game. But don't even think about doing the same for the accounting manager who insists on keeping her personal life personal.

We don't coach everyone the same because everyone is not the same. To get the most out of your team members, get inside their heads, figure out what motivates them and makes them tick. Then lead them accordingly. Call that a double standard if you will; sounds more like outstanding leadership to me. ■■■



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