

How Sports Can Teach Workplace Leadership Skills

On October 9, 2012, the San Francisco Giants found themselves in a deep hole. Facing elimination in the National League Divisional Series against Cincinnati Reds, the Giants looked like they were headed home from a dismal and brief playoff run. They had just lost the first two games at home, with Game 2 being a complete blowout (a 9-0 win for the Reds). However, Game 3 changed the course for the Giants in the 2012 playoffs, all thanks to outfielder and relatively new teammate, Hunter Pence. **Hours before Game 3, Pence took the initiative and gave his team a much needed pep talk in the visiting locker room.**

As San Francisco Chronicle columnist Bruce Jenkins recounts, “Manager Bruce Bochy called a team meeting in the clubhouse, said a few choice words, and then Pence took it upon himself to address the team. Normally, at times like this, the speaker will be a longtime veteran of the club, someone who exudes authority by his mere presence. Pence showed up only nine weeks ago—but if you’ve seen him play, you understand the burning desire he brings to the game.”

Pence’s speech emphasized teamwork, support and playing “one more day with you guys.”

The team was fired up and after a thrilling, 10-inning Game 3 win, Pence was an overnight hero. The Giants won the last three games against the Reds, becoming the first NL team to come back from a 0-2 deficit, and, eventually, won the 2012 World Series.

Clearly, Pence had a speaking talent that lifted up his teammates in their eleventh hour—but his actions showed the importance of developed leadership skills. **Whether you’re a professional athlete or not, sports participation can highlight leadership qualities that are both effective on and off the field.** Below are four leadership skills learned in athletics that have a direct workplace crossover.

1. Teamwork

Though this may be obvious, teamwork is one of the basic skills sports can teach participants. Teamwork helps motivate participants to do their part, assisting the team to reach its ultimate goal. Teamwork also involves delegation of tasks, which is what successful leaders do every day. Great leaders need team building skills in order to be examples and effective to those they lead. A growth of team building skills in the workplace can positively influence group projects, campaigns, employee engagement and motivation in the workplace.

2. Communication

When Pence addressed his teammates, he spoke about his love of the game and playing for his fellow teammates as inspiration. No doubt other Giants players felt the same way and this speech gave a sense of team unity—something that was missing in previous games.

Communication skills are vital for leaders to motivate, recognize and appreciate the great work of their departments and teams.

3. Strategic Development and Organizational Skills

Teamwork and communication are not effective unless there is organization and strategy behind it. Sports and team activities give opportunities for participants to come up with a game plan and strategies to win. Leaders always have the ultimate goal in mind. They do away with pointless meetings, develop strategies and make sure the work being done is effective and efficient.

4. Self Discipline

On an individual level, sports can give participants self discipline and understanding. Self discipline from sports can teach players what they need to practice, whether it's perfecting a softball batting stance or getting more endurance to run up and down the soccer field. Sports brings different challenges to each of the participants, but can also allow them to recognize the challenge at hand, their contributions to the team and make necessary improvements individually. Same is true in the workplace. Leaders are not perfect—instead they work hard on improving and developing new skills. Leaders need self discipline in order to be successful.

Leadership skills are important on and off the field. They help create championship teams, great work in the office and most importantly, personal growth.

FUSION FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

What can I improve on in these four categories to help me grow my leadership? How can I see athletics benefitting me in my ideal job after high school/college? What skills am I using every day through sport? What category above is my strength and how can I use this to help me in life?