



Leadership and management of your football club

How to develop and improve the way you lead and manage your club



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Successful leadership and management of the modern community football club require delivery against sporting and social objectives while ensuring the financial sustainability of the organisation. Leaders and managers need a distinct set of skills to thrive in this context where clubs are operating in a competitive and changing environment.

Community sport is very democratic. People running our sports clubs could be as different as a senior corporate executive with several degrees to a person from the shop floor who left school at 16. This could be described as 'opposites meet' which can both be a good and a bad thing. The challenge is how to drive the club forward to become a more welcoming and sustainable enterprise.

Very few clubs do not have a programme which supports coaches who want to develop new skills. That is not the case with the volunteers who are involved with the actual development and running of the club. Very few clubs actively look at how they can improve their leadership and management and, say, develop more efficient decision making (just look at the time it often takes to make even the simplest decisions in clubs).

Hopefully, this guide can help you to improve the leadership and management at your club. This is not an exact science and each club and environment is different, so you will have to adapt the advice given here to your specific situation. This is work in progress, so please do let us know how you are getting on.

If you have any questions or comments, please get in touch with your FAW Trust contact or email me on svend@smnuk.com

Good luck

Svend Elkjaer

Sports Marketing Network



What is your club for?



OR



Is this your committee and club not knowing where you are going, what you are doing or what your clubs is for?

Is this your committee and club in full flow, knowing exactly where you are going, what each of you is supposed to be doing and you all know and agree what the club is for?

“Is this the way you run your club?”

‘Just ask Alice, she will know’ ‘I’ll do one more term...’

‘We’ve never had to do that before’

‘We’re better off sticking with what we know’

‘You just can’t get volunteers these days’

‘Vision, plans...this is a sports club, not a business’

‘There’s nothing wrong with the way I have run this club for 28 years, is there?’

Your priorities - you decide:

Now imagine I had £3000 to donate to your club and each of these activities would cost £3000 so you have to decide which one to spend the money on:

1. Sending the under 15s to that tournament in Ireland
2. Recruiting a better player
3. Improve the clubhouse/pitch

Which option would you choose?

And the rest of the club committee, which one would they go for?

Do you all agree? **What is your club for?**

What is the culture at your club?

Dependency culture

Like it or not, your club has NOT got a God-given right to exist and in today's environment, you have to earn support and involvement. Far too often I hear the Chair of a sports club complaining about the lack of support from the local community, the governing body, the Government etc., and when you investigate further it frequently emerges that the club is not engaging with anybody outside its own ranks.

Lack of skills

The 'we are a sports club, so don't expect too much from us' attitude can kill a club and is completely outdated. Far too often we involve people with the club because they are former players/friends/sons/daughters of the Chair etc. WRONG! If you want to get the best Treasurer why not ask one of your accountancy firm sponsors to provide one of their young apprentices. They get the experience, you get the skills. If you want somebody to write your programme notes, go to your local college or university and ask some of the media/journalism students. The ambitious/good students will relish the experience.

Change vs. heritage

If any of these statements can be heard in your club, you should be really worried:

Do we really want these (noisy kids, old folks, chatty women) here?

'That won't work here...'

'But it won't sell any more advertising boards'

'This IS an extension of my living room'

'What is the internet anyway?'

A can do club or can't do club...

Regardless of the level, your club is playing at, ambition and professionalism on and off the pitch is a pre-requisite. Yes, professionalism is not about money, it is about attitude. A club with a can-do attitude as opposed to one with a can't do attitude will grow and prosper. Can do clubs have a buzz about them. People are happy and busy. They know what success is and why it's important. They're also clear that they have to deliver – that the buck stops with them. Can do clubs have a confidence about them that inspires people to try new initiatives, safe in the knowledge that their club is the sort of club that can do things.

A friend of mine is in charge of 250 tenanted pubs for a brewery. He tells me that with the same location and the same beers a different landlord can mean up to 50% difference in pub turnover. In the end, it is all down to people and their understanding of and empathy with people.

How often have we heard comments from the old guard within the club when someone puts forward a new idea along the lines of: 'we tried that 17 years ago', 'it may have worked at other clubs or in other sports', 'it would never work here', 'this is not the way to do things at a sports club'. Within Can do Clubs there is mutual respect between the people with the insight and the people with the ideas and they move forward together.

Your club's culture

Culture is the everyday reality of club life. The culture is not the mission statement, the vision, your bank balance or the club handbook, though all those contribute to creating it. The culture is what we say and do, the way we behave, the way we treat each other, our coaches, our community and ourselves.

In essence, it's the 'personality' of the company,

While speeches and grand plans have some influence on the culture, they are just as likely to have a negative as a positive influence. Ultimately, it's what leaders do much more than what we say that makes the culture what it is.

Creating a culture

There are only two main ways to build an organisational culture; either with consideration and conscious intent; or, by contrast, to let the culture come together as it does, giving it little thought in the process.

If you want to build or re-build a certain culture be prepared that it is a lengthy, and sometimes, very difficult process, but the journey starts with the first step

Teach it

The more - and more effectively - we teach people that we are looking for in our culture, the more like it will become reality. At club gatherings and meetings always talk about what culture you want to see in your club. Describe the way you'd like things to be working.

Talk about the informal ways you envision people working together, the way you want people to be treated as valued customers, etc.

One of the best ways to teach culture is to tell stories. There's something solid that resonates when people hear nice tales of how things were handled in a difficult situation or how the club has successfully developed to where it is. And because culture is what's happening, not just what we say should be going on, the stories resonate in ways that just 'having a strategy' cannot.

Define it

You may not currently have complete agreement across your club as to what kind of culture you would like to have at your club. If that is the case, get together leaders and stakeholders of your club together to discuss and agree on what your desired culture is and then write it down. You could do this at the same time as you are discussing and deciding on your vision and strategy.

Putting it in writing and communicating your vision for your club's culture is an essential element in making it successful.

Live it

Culture is primarily about what we do and less about what we say. If we don't live it's never going to play out as we want. The culture within clubs is built slowly over time, not with a quick decision.

Leaders within clubs have to understand that people within, and often also outside, the club see and hear everything you do and say. The more you talk to newcomers, the more you are sending out messages that yours is a welcoming club.

How you handle difficult situations is one of the biggest contributors to the creation of your club's culture. It's easier to build a culture when everything is going well. But strong cultures are partially built by what we do during hard times. When money is tight, how do we act? When we make a mistake, how do we own up and learn from it?

Too many clubs have a culture where they never admit they can make mistakes and if they do their 'blame-culture' ensures that they convince themselves that it's everybody else's fault and therefore there is nothing they can do about it. Those clubs will never learn and never improve!

There we can only suggest that you openly accept that you have erred, acknowledge what's happened to apologise for it and then move forward together. Then everything works more effectively.

Everyone in the club - not just the committee members - must take responsibility for the culture you have and make it the culture you want.

Develop an open culture

Try and develop an open and learning culture where new ideas are welcomed and where the club is well run both on and off the pitch. Sometimes, when new ideas do not seem to work, people are quite prepared to learn from the experience and there is no 'blame culture'. As a result, people within these clubs, are happy to put forward new ideas and new people are more inclined to join as volunteers.

"Each time we ask more of ourselves than we think we can give...and then we give it...we grow."

Cicero, 106 - 43 BC

In effective relationships, whether boss with employee, staff with volunteers or chairman with the committee, there must be a balance.

This should reflect how much both are getting out of the relationship. If one or the other tends to gain more and this conspicuous to the other, productivity diminishes.

Each person in the relationship has to receive his or her needed degree of satisfaction and gratification - this is what volunteer work is all about.

Especially in voluntary organisations, such as community sports clubs, a leader has only so much power over people. It is useful, positive, creative power if it includes finding the best people for the jobs, people who receive in return for their giving. Meeting the needs of others so they will meet yours, is one of the most important things a sports club leader can do.

From committee to team - change your structure and culture:



A committee decides, is boring, exists to set policy, will drain the life out of you and is for those who desire status. Whereas a team does, is exciting, exists to win, will add to your life and is for those who want to make a difference.

The word team connotes vision, goals, purpose, unity and accomplishment.

On the other hand, the word committee just “sucks life right out of you”!

1. Fuel the pioneering spirit - keep the momentum going by building regular events and WOW moments into the life of your club. Many times a club loses that pioneering spirit as it ages becomes complacent and gets stuck in the rut that deters new ideas and pushes away new people. Build momentum, involve more people, dare to think new and see your club grow.



2. Good leaders let people go. If you want to drive your club forward, on and off the pitch, you will no doubt experience people who simply cannot see any reason for any changes. They have been here for 29 years, so they know best. Those people can present serious barriers to your club's health and that must come first. It seems harsh to suggest to ask a long-standing member to leave, but if they are holding your club back and deterring good, new people from getting involved...what are your options?

3. Visit other clubs and steal their stuff and don't worry about being original - learn all you can about the principles from others, but then apply them in the context of your own setting and club



4. Be careful who you listen to. When you start making changes and showing leadership, you will be met with criticism from the stalwarts and 'the way we do things around here' brigade. Answering every criticism and explaining every questioned action will wear you out. Ask the people who want to drive the club forward, listen to them and act.

Don't waste time trying to placate the Victor Meldrews!



5. Get geeked about gadgets. Yes, I appreciate that technology is developing at an amazing rate but that should not stop you from benefiting from using it. You simply ignore this at your peril. If you want to engage with people in a timely, inexpensive and relevant way embrace these tools, saving you hours stuffing envelopes. If you feel that all this is not for you, then ask and involve other people, perhaps younger members.



6. Innovate or die. Yes, I know trying new things is messy and requires dare - but without it your future is going to be bleak. So try walking football for 60-year-olds, doggie swimming in the lake, football golf, float-athons in the pool to generate income or crolf (a combination of golf and croquet).

By the way, all these activities already exist!



7. Involve both artists and administrators. We all like to be with people like ourselves - we feel safer and more comfortable that way. A club run just by administrators runs the risk of being boring and unwelcoming. If you only have artists in charge of your club, it may be very exciting but probably out of control! Get the artists and administrators to work together and respect each other and you are on to a winner.



8. Somebody has to live and die for your database. Having correct information about the people you are involved with through your club and then stay in contact with them is absolutely critical. If you, week in, week out ensure that people who you engage with are added to your database over time you will have an incredibly powerful tool to provide people with targeted information - at very little cost.



But one person must be in charge and 'own' this.

9. Say thank you, send birthday cards and give people small cool gifts. I don't really have to explain this, do I? So why do so few clubs actually do it?



10. Keep budgeting simple and get everybody involved. In all the clubs I have come across, budgeting rarely takes place and if it happens then it's something that the treasurer does and then presents to other people. Wrong! Determine what you want to achieve with your club over the next one, three and five years. Have a thorough analysis and discussion of how you want to generate the income required. You must all be involved. The treasurer should not decide how to spend your money.

Why leadership and management are different; and why it matters

Leadership is the art of getting or inspiring people to do something - by contrast management deals with the allocation of resources associated with a task.

- Leaders like movement and change, managers like processes and stability
- Managers see people as machines who perform a task, leaders see people as being creative beings
- Managers issue orders and expect them to be followed, leaders have the confidence to lead through trust
- Leaders know they are not always right, managers don't know that because the notion simply doesn't occur to them
- Managers never learn (as they have learnt what they need to know), leaders are curious so they can improve

The club committee - now and in the future

From committee to project group

From



To



From committee to project group

Club committee today

- FireBellies
- Operations
- Interested
- Stability
- Gut feeling
- Lifestyle
- Traditions

Project group of the future

- ✓ FireBellies with skills
- ✓ Strategy
- ✓ Competent
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Facts
- ✓ Tasks
- ✓ Values and frameworks



How to overcome complacency and introduce real urgency

With the help of a few quotes from Wayne Gretzky (in italics below), not just widely regarded as the best ever ice hockey player but also his intelligence and reading of the game were unrivalled (see box below), I would like to put forward some suggestions as to how you, and your organisation, can overcome the smugness that can be so detrimental to your future survival and growth.

1. It all starts with real urgency. Real urgency is about getting things done and moving forward - day in, day out. False urgency happens when panic strikes due to some unexpected external pressure. As no one is prepared for or skilled to deal with the situation, everyone runs around like headless chickens and nothing really happens.

However, too often this flurry of activity is mistaken for progress.

Real urgency happens when you and like-minded people start to make changes on a regular basis, because, you want to move forward, now. You have it in your hearts that you want to make progress. Initially, you are a bit vulnerable, until you have gained some success (however small) and earned people's respect.

Deal with opportunities and challenges NOW - don't wait until next month's meeting. Give people the facts: 'We are losing money, members and community support - here are my/our thoughts on how to deal with it; for all of us.'

"Procrastination is one of the most common and deadliest of diseases and its toll on success and happiness is heavy."

2. Stop believing that 'it can't be done.' As Henry Ford (he of Ford T fame) commented: "When people say they can't or they can, they are normally right." Do the things you can do and gradually you'll start having small successes and other likeminded people will want to join you in your quest.

Have a vision of where you want to go yourself and where you would like your group/provider to be. Warning: If it's just about survival of yourself and your organisation, most other people won't care. What is your BIG Vision? Is it about 'helping people change their lives through sport' or is it just 'make sure we survive here?'

Make sure that you have communicated that vision and that you get buy-in from as many like-minded people as possible. However, don't waste time convincing the NoNos

"A good hockey player plays where the puck is."

A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be.

I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been."

3. Seek to better yourself and your club/activity provider. The more open your culture and the wider and more up-to-date your skills base is, the more likely you are to be able to embrace change and benefit from it.

Send people out. Visit outstanding clubs, leisure centres, community sports enterprises or even great hotels, leisure parks or community centres and learn from them. Attend one of SMN's workshops (or talk to us about running one in your area) and keep learning and implementing new ideas.

Do not accept the limited what I/we know here (which leads to the way we do things around here) - that will be your downfall.

"My success is not about creative genius.

It's all practice. I got it from my dad.

Nine out of ten people think it is instinct, and it isn't. Nobody would ever say a doctor had learned his profession by instinct yet in my own way I've put in almost as much time studying hockey as a medical student puts in studying medicine!"

4. Stay determined and ambitious Do NOT settle. It is easy to give up when the going gets a bit tough and then to lapse back into the status quo. The two main reasons why change initiatives fail are culture and habit; so get urgency, power and determination going from the beginning - big time and more!

Distinguish between Sceptics and NoNos and create a guiding team of like-minded people and earn some quick successes. Sceptics will need convincing through your facts and arguments and that can be done, but NoNos are more than just sceptics. They are always ready with ten reasons why the current situation is fine, why the problems/challenges others see don't exist and why we need to consider this and that a bit more.

Left alone NoNos can kill or mortally wound your organisation and I have, sadly, experienced situations, particularly in voluntary organisations, where long-standing NoNos would rather see their club go down than change their mindset and behaviour.

Do NOT waste time trying to co-opt NoNos - but don't ignore them. An ignored NoNo can create much mischief; you are after all, disturbing/ruining their disturbed view of the world.

There are three ways of dealing with NoNos: a) distract them with urgent jobs that take them away from the real issues b) expose their behaviour and let social pressure do its work and they leave c) force them out.

To be honest: I know it is very difficult, but my recommendation is option C.

While I am not suggesting that you immediately get rid of every NoNo, every time I come across a really successful Community Sports Enterprise, there's not a single NoNo in sight.

Some 'stuck-in-the-mud' people see innovation and change as something that disturbs their finely tuned policies and procedures that have served them well for decades

"The highest compliment that you can pay me is to say that I work hard every day"

5. Learn from your failures and successes - then your hit rate improves. Be honest with yourself and your colleagues as to why new initiatives work and don't work. Gradually you will increase your knowledge and understanding and become more successful - which is great. But you have to set some ships into the sea, that's what ships are for - not to sit safely in the harbour.

"You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

6. Enjoy the challenge - try to have fun while you are moving forward; otherwise, you are too easily de-motivated and thrown off course when the sea becomes a bit choppy. I know - easier said than done, but that's where continuous progress, however small and slow, becomes so important.

"The only way a kid is going to practise is if it is total fun for him... and it was for me."



What do you want to stop, start and continue?

Every now and then get as many people within your club together to discuss and agree on what they want to:

1. Stop doing - because you know what practices and habits are getting in the way, preventing you from being efficient, or simply they aren't good for you!
2. Start doing - because there's always some new idea waiting in the wings that you just haven't got around to trying out yet, and you know what needs to change
3. Change doing - we are all guilty of 'the way we do things around here' syndrome. Could you benefit from using technology better in your membership communication? Introduce a representative from the junior section to your committee?
4. Continue doing - because it's not all bad! It's important to remember the good stuff and to think about how you can build on your achievements and successes

The right Change Makers can help grow your club

We do need passionate, skilled people who are willing to drive their club forward: We call them Change Makers. What is crucial is that they have the right skills and attitudes.

Change Makers without the right skills and a 'closed mind' can do more damage than good. It is not good enough to love your club and sport.

The NEW volunteer

- ✓ Has got specific skills etc. that the club requires
- ✓ Will volunteer to give something back and develop their skills. There has to be something in it for them
- ✓ Requires other volunteers to be as professional as they are (if I am going to run around organising events, I want the website guy to update the website in up-to-date)
- ✓ Will probably volunteer for a few years
- ✓ Sources: Sponsors, colleges/universities, specialists
- ✓ Get younger people involved – sustainability
- ✓ 'Search for the Stars' programme

The NEW volunteer... how to manage him/her

- ✓ Expect them to dedicate limited, free time, say two hours a month
- ✓ They will possibly run one limited project
- ✓ They want to feel they belong
- ✓ They want to have fun and be part of the excitement
- ✓ Be prepared and indeed encourage him/her to speak their mind
- ✓ Needs managing like any other group or team

Change in a democracy!!!

Nothing is impossible until it is sent to a committee



Your next steps

Baby steps



Giant step for mankind

