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# What could an Executive Coach do for an Association Football Manager?

A Commentary

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The lead article in this volume highlights several critical aspects of effective leadership in modern times. First, the importance of leadership as an interpersonal, relationship-building endeavor cannot be overstated. Second, the exemplary leader is a caring individual who demonstrates understanding and empathy toward others. For our commentary, we draw upon a well-developed stream of literature germane to these two core issues presented in the article. We compare and contrast the feminine and masculine aspects of leadership. In particular, we discuss the contemporary feminization of leadership and describe several integral attributes of feminine leadership – a communal orientation, transformational behaviors, emotional intelligence, and empathy – each of which relate to the facets of sports coaching and leadership presented in the lead article.

## **THE FEMININE QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP**

From the traditional viewpoint, an effective leader was thought to be rational, task-oriented, directive, authoritative, competitive and competent. Individual achievements were accepted as indicators of effective leadership. However, the Great Man theory of leadership and similar individualistic perspectives have diminished over time.

Central characteristics of contemporary models of leadership include developing relationships, demonstrating coaching behaviors, communicating effectively, and building teams. The movement is more and more toward leading in a relational and collaborative way. Relational leadership refers to a process of working with and

through people. The leader is at the center of a network, connected to others through a web of relationships [1]. The relational connection supports, develops and strengthens others, builds interpersonal trust, nurtures voice and inclusion, and facilitates the accomplishment of the shared vision. Current views of effective leadership acknowledge that a blend of relational skills and task mastery is essential.

These contemporary descriptions of leadership incorporate stereotypically feminine qualities such as relationship-building and cooperation. This feminization of leadership has gained momentum in recent times, even in men's sports coaching, so much so that the *New York Times* reported that the secret to Duke University basketball Coach Mike Krzyzewski's success is that he coaches the way a woman would [2]. "Mike Krzyzewski...has some things to tell you about leadership. For starters, release your inner woman" [2].

Research on gender has identified two distinct orientations toward leadership, variously labeled as agentic or communal, instrumental or expressive, and masculine or feminine. Generally, women are thought to be communal and expressive while men are viewed as instrumental and agentic. Along these lines, women are seen as helpful, cooperative and caring, with a need for affiliation. On the other hand, men are believed to be independent, competitive, ambitious, and achievement-oriented [3]. Women tend toward a democratic, collaborative style of leading more than an autocratic, directive style [4].

In the past few decades, investigations into styles of leading have underscored that effective leaders inspire their followers and nurture their ability to be contributors. This leadership style was labeled transformational [5, 6] and contrasted with transactional leadership. Transformational leaders establish themselves as role models, and define future goals and plans to achieve them. These leaders mentor and empower their employees to develop their full potential. Perhaps most importantly, transformational leaders gain the trust and confidence of their employees thus building a long-term foundation for a strong relationship. Transactional leaders, on the other hand, lead in a more conventional manner. They appeal to the self interests of others and establish relationships based on exchange.

Transformational leadership behaviors are more communal and distinctively feminine. Women are inclined to adopt a transformational style of leadership more than men, especially attending to mentoring others and empowering them as individuals. Male leaders on the other hand score higher on most of the indicators of transactional leadership [7].

Almost everything in contemporary accounts of effective leadership comes back to relationships. The new viewpoint on leadership uses descriptors such as relational, caring, inclusive, and open. These relational and interactive aspects of leadership are stereotypically feminine while the command and control style is stereotypically masculine. Although the modern perspective on effective leadership in the literature centers on feminine qualities and behaviors, masculine models and standards prevail in practice [8]. For example, success is measured by individual performance and winning as opposed to incorporating a person's contributions to the team and assessing their interpersonal team-building capabilities. It is important that individuals feel aligned with the overall goals of the team and see themselves as integral team members. This in turn results in greater commitment to the team and better overall performance [9].

Relationships are arenas of growth and learning [10]. Relationship-building capabilities are associated with the emergence and the effectiveness of leaders [3], and successful coaching behaviors in leadership depend on effective interpersonal relationships [11]. Leaders in all arenas, including sports, must model and cultivate these relational aspects of leadership.

## **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, EMPATHY, AND LEADERSHIP**

Leaders who are successful in developing effective relationships are attuned to their own emotions and the emotions of others. This is the essence of emotional intelligence, the ability to perceive and understand emotions in self and others, and to manage those emotions appropriately [12]. Self-awareness is the foundation of emotional intelligence. Self-aware leaders recognize their own feelings and how those feelings affect them and their performance.

Relationship authenticity is the feeling of being in emotional connection with others [13]. The leader acts as the group's "emotional guide" [12] and needs to be able to perceive the emotional climate of the organization at both the individual and the collective levels. Through a finely-tuned awareness of others' emotions and needs, an emotionally intelligent leader can generate enthusiasm, establish cooperation and trust among team members, and engender collective accomplishment of team goals [14].

The ability to demonstrate the emotional intelligence competency of empathy, in particular, is critical for leadership and coaching in business and in sports [11]. In sports, emotions play a central role. A coach who is self aware and effectively manages his or her own emotions will more likely be able to read and manage the emotions of the team more effectively, thus creating optimal developmental conditions for the team [11].

Empathy is associated more with women than with men [15]. As an integral component of communal and transformational styles of leadership, empathy is a caring, trust building, two-way interactional process [16]. It is the interplay between people that is important; mutual empathy requires moving toward a shared sense of enhanced meaning, clarity, and enrichment. Mutual empathy fosters growth and development in all parties to the relationship. A lack of caring and empathy results in misunderstanding and misdirection on any team.

There is a competition for talent, and leaders must keep their team members engaged and challenged. The development of talent is one of the most important responsibilities of individuals in leadership roles. Leaders need empathy to develop and retain key people in their organizations. In order for a sports coach to be facile in two of the three standards for athletic coaches defined by the National Association for Sports and Physical Education, i.e., to recognize the psychological aspects of coaching and to develop the athletes [17], the coach needs to demonstrate empathy and understand the needs and motivational drives of individual athletes.

## **CONCLUSION**

The assessment of Coach Keane's coaching in Simon Jenkins' article presents the picture of an individual focused exclusively on performance, to the detriment of

emphasizing the more feminine qualities of leadership embedded in relational, communal, and transformational leadership behaviors. Demonstrating emotional intelligence and empathy allows for the creation of authentic, trust-based, and enduring relationships with the team. Leadership coaching behaviors that rely on these foundational competencies result in enhanced self awareness, learning, development, leadership and productivity at the individual and team performance levels [11]. While having a drive to win is crucial, exemplary leaders can achieve standout performance in their teams when they combine that drive with the authentic expression of the communal, relational, and transformational - the feminine - qualities of leadership.

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