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Step Three To Extraordinary Coaching For Sales Leaders

The pinnacle in coaching, I think, is the *extraordinary coach*. Like great coaches and good coaches, extraordinary coaches are always highly effective teachers. What makes just a few coaches truly extraordinary is that rare ability and willingness to teach their students valuable life lessons.

When I think of extraordinary coaching in sports I immediately think of John Wooden, UCLA's legendary basketball coach. If a sales leader could learn to lead his or her sales team like John Wooden led his collegiate basketball teams, the sales leader could become an extraordinary coach.

In his book, “Be Quick – But Don't Hurry,” Andrew Hill, a former UCLA basketball player, said “...everyone calls Wooden ‘Coach,’ but he was first and foremost a teacher.”

Like all great leaders and extraordinary coaches, John Wooden insisted on preparation and perfect practice from all team members. Wooden understood, as Andrew Hill writes, that “practice doesn’t make perfect – only perfect practice makes perfect,” and that “creating time for preparation and organization is the key to organizational efficiency.”

Bill Walton, the former UCLA center and NBA hall-of-famer, was astounded, as were his teammates, when on their first day of practice at UCLA John Wooden took great pains to demonstrate to his new All-American recruits how to properly put on their socks before starting basketball practice. None of the recruits could believe that their legendary coach was spending so much time instructing them on the fine art of donning their socks.

What they didn’t know then, and learned much later, was coach Wooden’s understanding that you will perform like you prepare and like you practice. If his players didn’t make absolutely sure their equipment was in order, it didn’t matter how gifted they were as athletes. Coach knew that foot blisters could keep a player with extraordinary ability from performing at even minimal proficiency.

The sales leader who aspires to become an extraordinary coach insists that his team always prepares and practices for important selling work. He knows that sales professionals won’t rise to the occasion in difficult selling situations – instead, they will default to their level of preparation and practice.

John Wooden, like all extraordinary coaches, had an unusual ability to identify talent, and to recruit talent that fit his team and his organizational structure. He knew that no matter how talented a player, a bad fit spelled disaster for the team, and that for the good of the team, recruiting mistakes must be corrected immediately.

Sales managers who aspire to become extraordinary coaches must, for the good of their teams, be willing to correct hiring mistakes – immediately, if not sooner.

Once he had recruited talented players that fit into his system, Coach Wooden understood that managing creativity requires flexibility and special insights that allow players to find balance between creativity and organization. Ultimately, his goal was to unlock the collective creativity of the team.

Sales managers who want to become extraordinary coaches will work hard to unlock the creativity of each team member and to blend that creativity into overall team performance.

What I think truly sets extraordinary coaches apart from all other coaches is certain wisdom, an unusual perspective on life, and their ability and willingness to impart life lessons to their teams. Players that were on Wooden's UCLA championship teams in the 1960's still talk today about the lessons they learned from Coach's *Pyramid of Success* – a plan for achieving great athletic performance and for living a productive, rewarding life.

As a coach, John Wooden gave his team the strategy, the tactics and the fundamental tools they would need to perform to the best of their potential. As an extraordinary coach, he gave them much more. Bill Walton may have summed it up best when he said, “While what Coach Wooden was teaching us had something to do with the game of basketball, it also had everything to do with life itself.”

The sales leader who aspires to be an extraordinary coach, like UCLA's John Wooden, will be seen by his team as an effective teacher of selling fundamentals, a recruiter and manager of great talent, and someone who inspires and demands great performance from each individual on his team. But, like John Wooden's basketball players, the sales professionals who are led by a sales leader who is also an extraordinary coach will see that what the leader teaches them has something to do with sales, and it also has everything to do with life itself.

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