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CHAPTER FOUR

Leadership is the release of energy.

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Author of *On Leadership***Are You Leader Enough?
Leadership as Emotional Commitment**

I know many effective leaders who don't consider themselves leaders at all, partly because we tend to think there is a leadership mold: a leader looks and behaves a certain way. In our society this often means a tall, good-looking, white male who is articulate and charismatic. The thinking is that if you don't fit the mold (and how many of us do?), you really can't be a leader.

But leadership is simply the release of energy to get important work done. One's height, skin color, gender and attractiveness are usually irrelevant to actually getting important work done. Even articulateness can be overrated. The real currency of an effective leader is Emotional Commitment to achieving a vision.

Eugene J. Webb, author of *Unobtrusive Measures* and a mentor of mine at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, used to say, "You can smell emotional commitment a mile away." Your emotional commitment draws the commitment of others. If you have a strong emotional commitment to achieving a goal, and you get people to help you do it, you are a leader. It's that simple.

Leadership is a team sport. Although the solitary leader is a staple in our society's mythology, great organizations usually have a strong leadership team. There are few things of importance that a lone individual can do alone. You have to put together a leadership team that shares your emotional commitment to developing Better Athletes, Better People to give yourself the best chance to succeed.

What Leadership Mostly Is

John Gardner once said to me, "Leadership is mostly teaching and selling. If you're not teaching, if you're not selling, you're not leading."

Compare teach-and-sell with many would-be leaders who "preach-and-tell." They get so wound up in their message that they end up preaching a sermon rather than engaging in a conversation. Great teachers engage people in conversations because it is usually conversations with people we respect that lead to insight and change and even, at times, to transformation.

Would-be leaders also often *tell* people what they should do rather than selling. Selling involves asking questions and listening carefully to identify the overlap between a person's goals and your products or services. Interestingly, engagement and listening seem to come more easily to women than men, which is why I think many women are natural leaders.

Share your passion in a way that leaves room for others to also share theirs. When I first asked Jim Perry, a hall-of-fame coach and athletic director from Southern California, if he would get involved with PCA, he said, "As important as this is to you, that's how important it is to me." Jim's passion for using sports to develop Better Athletes, Better People, along with his talent for inspiring others, has resulted in him becoming one of PCA's finest Trainers, someone we send all over the country and even abroad to spread the PCA Movement.

Relentlessly Fill Emotional Tanks

Recognition is a major leadership task.

We teach coaches that filling the Emotional Tanks of their players is one of their most important tasks. The E-Tank is like the gas tank of a car – if it's low you're not going to go very far. When players' E-Tanks are regularly filled, they end up doing things that even they didn't know they could do.

It's as important to fill adults' Emotional Tanks. Most adults get recognized so infrequently at work or home that if you recognize them, they deeply appreciate it, and it energizes them. We all have so many stresses, so many disappoint-

ments, so many tasks that we have to get done with little or no recognition, that our E-Tanks are often near empty. Make a commitment that it will be different in your organization.

Here are two actions to fill your leadership team's E-Tanks regularly:

- **Become a Noticer:** When you look for them, you see appreciation-worthy things all throughout your life. But you have to look, and then take the time and make the effort to recognize people for them. Become a “Noticer” of the helpful things people do, and recognize them for their contributions.

It's great to tell people directly that you appreciate their hard work. Also use what I call “Third-Party Recognition:” tell someone how much you appreciate someone else's contribution. You will find that your comments often find their way back to the person who did the work. In some ways, it's more of a Tank-filler when a third party lets you know that your boss (or co-worker or spouse or friend) was praising you to them.

Keep a list of things you notice each week that you want to thank people for. Recognition is one of the most important things you can do as a leader, so don't leave this to chance – keep a list and make it a habit to tell people how much you appreciate their contributions.

- **Appreciations & Triumphs:** We open the floor at PCA staff and board meetings to anyone who has appreciations or triumphs to share. This part of the meeting can go on for 15 minutes or more as people have gotten used to keeping track of how others have helped them, and they enjoy sharing these stories.

Beginning your meetings with a flood of positivity will result in a team of people with full E-Tanks who are emotionally equipped to tackle tough problems.

It may take people time to embrace appreciations and triumphs, so remember that even if people aren't visibly pleased at being recognized, they are soaking it in like a hot bath, and keep at it.

Fill E-Tanks relentlessly. It may be your most powerful leadership tool to develop an effective leadership team that shares your Emotional Commitment to the vision.

Take-Aways

- 1 **Leadership is the release of energy. Your Emotional Commitment is what draws the Emotional Commitment of others and releases their energy for your shared vision.**
- 2 **Leadership is a team sport. Recruit people to your leadership team who can help you achieve your vision.**
- 3 **Leadership is mostly teach-and-sell (rather than preach-and-tell). Engage and listen. Share your passion in a way that leaves room for others to express their passion.**
- 4 **Recognition is a major leadership task and a powerful tool to develop an effective leadership team. Become a Noticer and relentlessly fill the Emotional Tanks of people in your organization.**

DEVELOPING Better Athletes, Better People

A Leader's Guide to Transforming
High School and Youth Sports into
a Development Zone



By Jim Thompson
Foreword by Doc Rivers



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