

Leadership Lessons Learned—Coach Tony Dungy

Modeling a Legacy of Leadership

By Rhea Blanken, Results Technology, Bethesda MD

Tony Dungy is one of the most respected and popular NFL coaches in the National Football League. His influence to the game of football resonated all the way to the 2009 Super Bowl win by the Pittsburgh Steelers. For association boards and staffs often overtaken by today's circumstances, following Coach Dungy's philosophies are certain to boost your efforts.

Legacy of Leadership

Dungy's career includes several notable firsts. He is the first NFL head coach to defeat all 32 NFL teams. At age 25, he was the youngest assistant coach and at age 28, the youngest coordinator in NFL history. In 2007, Dungy became the first African American to coach a winning Super Bowl (XLI) team. By the time he retired in Jan. 2009, he had two Super Bowl victories (XIII, XLI); two AFC Championships victories (1978, 2006); achieved a regular season record 139-69-0; a playoff record of 9-10; and an overall record of 148-79-0.

Dungy played quarterback for University of Minnesota, played safety for the Pittsburgh Steelers from 1977-78 and the San Francisco 49'ers in 1979, was head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers 1996-2001, and head coach of the Indianapolis Colts 2002-2008.

On December 18, 2008 after securing his tenth straight playoff appearance with a win against the Jacksonville Jaguars, Dungy set a new NFL record for consecutive playoff appearances by a head coach. Dungy knows how to win. He has coached many through defeat and on to victory. He knows how to teach leaders to lead. Coach Dungy believed his primary job, as a coach, was to build men worthy of being role models to a nation of boys who look up to them.

Coaching Leaders to Lead

Leaders mentor others into leaders—that is part of a leader's role. Coach Dungy has given more than lip service to this philosophy—he has lived it. Influenced by the coaching philosophies and defensive system of Chuck Noll, Dungy's coaching legacy grew from the Pittsburgh Steelers' dynasty of the 1970s and has spread its influence wide and deep. As of January 29, 2009, three from Dungy's coaching staff are head coaches of NFL teams: Jim Caldwell, Indianapolis Colts coach, was Assistant head coach Indianapolis, Lovie Smith, Chicago Bears coach, was Linebackers coach at Tampa Bay, and Mike Tomlin, Pittsburgh Steelers coach, was Defensive backs coach at Tampa Bay!

Coaching philosophy

Dungy's philosophy was formed by taking something from every coach he came in contact with — Noll in Pittsburgh, Walsh in San Francisco, Schottenheimer in Kansas City, and Green in Minnesota. He took his own beliefs and values and blended it with their teaching. He was mentored by many and has maintained that tradition.

No Excuses-No Explanations

In his memoir, *Quiet Strength: The Principles, Practices, and Priorities of a Winning Life*, Coach Dungy speaks of living a life and playing the game of football from the prospective of



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responsibility and accountability. Dungy was clear to his coaches and team what the goal was—to win the game. He knew having talent with no accountability for delivery of the results and lack of unity contributes to a losing environment. He worked towards both for each man on his team and coaching staff.

He believed having everyone pulling together at the same time for the same result was essential. But just as important, he knew people used circumstances as excuses or explanations for not playing their best. This was unacceptable to him. His expectations were unmistakable: “be a pro; act like a champion; respond to adversity, don’t react to it; be on time—being late means it’s not important to you or you can’t be relied upon; execute—do what you are supposed to do, when you are supposed to do it, not almost - all the way, not most of the time - all the time; and take ownership, whatever it takes.”

Next Man Up

He knew it took all 53 players on his team to win so he trained even the 43rd player on his roster as if he would be the 3rd player. This was Dungy's coaching philosophy. He insisted his team have a thought process, a philosophy of action and the commitment to stick with it, even if personnel changes occurred during a game. He knew injuries can happen at any time and the game must continue. His coaches and team trained and practiced: everyone has a job to do; every job impacts the team’s results; and anyone may be called upon at any time to do more if the situation demands so be ready.

“The good news is that Coach Dungy... is moving his extraordinary influence to other places. Just like he did for me and for countless other players, he will always be able to help teach young men how to be grown and able men. And we need this, not just in football, but in the bigger game of life.”

--Warrick Dunn, Tampa Bay Buccaneers running back

Consider

- What does your organization’s leadership tree look like?
- How does your organization nurture Board, volunteer and staff leaders?
- How are accomplishments from your best and brightest tracked and honored?
- How are mentors selected, developed and cultivated?
- How does accountability and unity manifest in your organization?
- What testimonials would your staff give confirming your leadership legacy?

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