

MANAGEMENT LESSONS FROM MOVIES

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REMEMBER THE TITANS

AND LESSONS IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Reviewed by
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**MANAGEMENT
LESSONS FROM
MOVIES**



THE STORY IN BRIEF

Remember the Titans starring Denzel Washington is a must watch movie if you are looking for inspiration, and also, an all round cinematic experience. Set in a time where segregation was still common, the story chronicles the appointment of a 'Black' Head Football Coach (**Coach Boone**) to what was a fully white school which has now being forced to bring 'coloured' kids as well. Things turn ugly from the get go : and the current Coach (Coach Yoast) - a hugely successful one who had led the team to multiple victories steps down and leaves the Coaching Staff. **Coach Boone** offers an olive branch and Coach Yoast decided to come in as his Assistant : to ensure the transition goes smoothly. Thus starts what turns into being a firm friendship and also a powerful combination that brings not only a team but an entire community together. Through many trials and tribulations, the movie demonstrates what can be achieved if egos are set aside and a common Vision is worked towards, whilst also chronicling the deep bonds that develop in the field even amongst those who start out as enemies.

The fundamental theme across the movie is that of Leading Change and Renewal...



1. WHAT TO CHANGE ? START WITH THE TOP

Herman Boone's appointment is not a popular one : compounded by the fact that Coach Yoast is not only talented and accomplished, but deeply respected, trusted and loved by everybody. However, both as a symbolic gesture as well as a much needed power shift, the decision needs to be made. IF the school is going to be a combined school, and if 'blacks' and 'whites' are to coexist, it is important for positions of peer to be shared as well.

Change is never easy - or popular. However, IF you want to change the culture, and the status quo, then, it is critical to start at the very top. It is important to note that **Herman Boone** was NOT simply appointed because of his skin colour - it was absolutely evident that he had the skill, the competency and also the 'stomach' for the job.

So, if you want to change the organisation : make sure you start at the top : and make sure you find the right person to do the job...



2. SET ASIDE EGOS - WORK TOWARDS INCLUSION

Coach Boone understands the ground situation very well - and is quick to know that having Hines in his corner is going to go a long way in pacifying the opposing forces and smooth things over with the 'white' community. Going over to Yoast's house and inviting him to join him was not an easy conversation to have : and rightfully Hines is offended. However, making that gesture was important : specially given that it was done sincerely.

Yoast's reluctant acceptance of the offer, influenced heavily by his spunky and rather wise daughter allows the team to have two Coaches who have very different leadership and management styles : but combined becomes an amazing force.

What was good to see is that both men who are equally strong willed and stubborn in their own rights were able to set aside prejudices and work towards a common objective. This is the key : specially at the helm of an organisation. To be able to put aside egos and work towards a common purpose or vision. If there is division at the top, it almost always percolates to the rest of the rest of the organisation.



3. SOME THINGS YOU NEED TO FORCE

Some times, when change is taking place - specially if the change is a fundamental change - then, consultations and getting buy in doesn't work. Though it is always preferable to get the support and buy in from everyone and all key stakeholders, this is often impractical when it comes to making radical changes.

So, at times, you need to just go for it - and trust in your judgement and that it is for a greater good. **Coach Boone** does this unapologetically during the first camp that he sets up for the combined team. This sets the tone for both teams to either come together, or be suffer through what will become even more gruelling practices. This hard nosed and uncompromising approach broke the resistance down, and enabled everyone to at least catch a glimpse of what the bigger purpose was : enabling the team to finally set aside differences and come together



4. WHAT IS FORCED DOES NOT LAST : YOU NEED BUY IN : AND BUY IN COMES FROM WITHIN THE TEAM

Even though the team 'came together' during camp and practices, it was clear that when they were removed from that environment, the old culture keeps coming back and the team gets sucked into it. The **REAL** change in the team happens because of a huddle they call in, and discuss the matter amongst themselves. The **TEAM** decides to ensure they remain together and not falter amidst the chaos of societal pressures : and this is what really turns the tide. It is here that they come up with how they enter the field - in what becomes their signature style.

So, forcing something works initially - but for it take root you really need it to come from within. Towards this, the collective needs to try buy into the ethos.



5. GOOD COP - BAD COP

What is made clear throughout the movie is the amazing power of two very different styles of leadership combining forces to make the team truly effective. The hard nosed, no nonsense styled **Coach Boone** and the more accommodating, fatherly and often softer Coach Yoast becomes an indomitable force. One without the other would probably have led to disaster given the circumstances.

We often think of one **BEST** style of leadership. Specially in times of change, a combination of styles is needed - and it is almost impossible for one person to have all the desired qualities and personalities to make it work. As such, for change to be truly successful, you really do need a collective leadership approach.



6. LEADERS ACROSS THE BOARD

Notice that different players take leadership at different times. The Captain and the Coaches are NOT the only people who carry the leadership role. Campbell was instrumental in ensuring Garry was a better leader. Take Sunshine in a crucial match. Rev in key moments of need. Even the unlikely Louie who plays a key role in making friends irrespective of colour that helps unite the team. What about Yoast's daughter who influences her dad to set aside differences and give **Boone** 'something the others are not expecting' at the all important final match which eventually leads to the State Championship. Let's not forget Mrs. Bertier whose presence gave a much needed boost to the team and the community - and her stoic demand that the team does not show weakness amidst what was a catastrophic personal injury that saw her son as an invalid.

The movie is a great example that leadership is never about a title : that **EVERYONE** needs to chip in and take leadership when the situation demands it.



7. LET GO ONCE THE TEAM IS SET AND ALLOW CHANGE TO HAPPEN ORGANICALLY AFTERWARDS

Even though **Boone** was very much the authoritarian type leader who often micromanaged and wanted things 'his way' : even he learnt to 'let it go' when the team was 'ready.'

Allowing the team to make decisions, come together, see through the change initiated at the top is critical for change to take root and eventually become part of the culture. Unless leaders let go, there is an unhealthy over dependence on one person to carry an initiative through - which is always counterproductive.

So, when the team is ready - you need to trust them - and let **THEM** make the decisions, and intervene only when required.



8. STAND UP FOR WHAT IS RIGHT - EVEN AT A PERSONAL COST

Coach Yoast's defiant stand at the semi finals was something everyone took note of, and turned the tides for the game - and also - set the tone for those who thought undue pressure and favouritism and such will work.

He lost the Hall of Fame because of it. If you want change to happen you must be willing to pay a personal price for it at times. Often what is right and what is convenient or personally beneficial are at opposite ends : and you need to make a choice - and the choice you make will make all the difference to the overall result.

Bertier's removal of his best friend from the team, and even stand firm on his principles with the love of his life are also great demonstrations of standing up for what is right : which enabled him to truly make the team and the cause become sacrosanct !



9. MAKE ANY SITUATION A RALLYING CALL

The Captian's accident shattered confidence. It completely sucked the motivation and energy off the team. Being defiant, strong willed and unwilling to let go of the overall objective was not easy : but was an important decision to have been made. What was also important is that everyone rallied around it - including the paralysed Bertier ! **NOTHING** was as important as the overall goal that was set.

In change programs, there are often major setbacks which threaten to derail everything that was done until then. These are the times leaders need to really stand tall and stand firm, and rally the team around the set back, and make it into being a rallying cry for victory and overcoming any obstacle that stands in the way...



10. MAKE CHANGE LAST

What is important is not so much that the team won the Championship : but that they remained friends, and became beacons for social change in their community. They not only came together as a team - and remained that way - they also ensured they led the way within the community to bring about wider societal change.

Making change last is important : otherwise it would all be for nothing...

Disney

REMEMBER THE TITANS

JERRY BRUCKHEIMER PRODUCTION



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