

Bronco Teamwork, The Legacy of the Orange Crush

The Denver Broncos NFL legacy is one of team success. With six AFC championships including two Super Bowl championships, all in the span of 21 years, we have been one of the NFL's most successful franchises.

When I came to the Broncos in 1983 as a twelfth round draft choice, I was just another foolish rookie. Fortunately for me the Bronco's defensive roster was full of veteran players with a team focus. Ruben Carter, Steve Foley, Louis Wright, Tom Jackson, Barney Chavous, Brison Manor, and Randy Gradishire were all veteran players from the famed "Orange Crush" defense. They not only taught me how to be a professional and selfless team player, but in many ways they taught me how to be a man. There are only forty nine roster spots on an NFL team, so each rookie who makes the team takes a veteran's job. Despite the limited job pool, these veterans knew that for the team to be successful they needed to mentor the twelve rookies that had made the final roster that year. They needed to get them up to speed in a hurry. The veteran's focus on team goals, instead of their own concerns, was a great example for us as young players. The "Orange Crush" left a legacy that has lasted long after their playing days were over.

I played on some great Bronco teams in my twelve years in the NFL. We won three AFC championships and were usually in contention for the AFC West title. On those teams the coaches got along with the players; the offense got along with the defense; the veterans got along with the rookies; it was fun to go to work. I also played on some bad Bronco teams when we didn't have that togetherness. White guys didn't get along with black guys; linemen didn't get along with backs; rich guys didn't get along with richer guys; it was hard to go to work. I longed for the days of camaraderie. The strange thing was that most of the players were the same. The difference of adding and subtracting a few players can dramatically change a team's chemistry.

A team is like a teeter-totter with a group of leaders on one side and egos on the other. The middle of the see-saw is occupied by the largest group. These are the undeclared teammates that can go either way. A leader thinks we not me. The team's mission always comes first. A leader thinks long term and realizes that his personal success and job satisfaction is directly tied to the team's success. A leader is willing to sacrifice for the good of the team. They look to build up their teammates when ever they can.

An ego thinks only of his or own short term gain. They don't want the rest of the team "holding them back". They aren't accountable or ethical. If a team goal happens to coincide with an ego's short term interests, everyone on the team will be told of the ego's sacrifice in that area. An ego sees his teammates as competition and will not mentor them or recommend them for promotion. An ego downplays his or her teammate's accomplishments, while broadcasting any failures.

By adding or subtracting a leader or an ego you can tip the team teeter-totter in one direction or the other. The undecided teammates in the middle will start to slide in that direction, developing team momentum towards success or failure. This is how an individual can change the culture of their, workplace, family, or football team. Step out of that middle group of undecideds and become a leader.

Leadership is the ultimate form of teamwork. It doesn't matter if you are vocal or not. There are all kinds of leaders. The four Cs that all leaders have in common are commitment, community, clarity, and consistency. Commitment to the team's mission is necessary for leadership. A great leader adopts the team passion as his or her own mission. A leader makes an effort to develop relationships with everyone on the team. She should know the strengths and weaknesses of each of her teammates so the strengths can be utilized for the team's benefit and the team can cover for any shortcomings. This community of relationships forms bonds between teammates that last a lifetime. Clarity of motive means that a leader's communication and actions demonstrate his or her commitment to the team's mission. These actions need to be consistent or a leader will quickly lose credibility with teammates.

The Denver Bronco's success as an organization is an example of teamwork while the latest USA Olympic Basketball "dream team" coached by Larry Brown, is an excellent example of great talent underachieving because they didn't operate as a team. Your teams need you to buy in and step forward as a leader. As a leader you will enjoy your team relationships more than ever, you will see your team succeed, and you will ultimately go way beyond what you could accomplish on your own.

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