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Remember the Titans - Five Step Analysis

Plot Summary

In April of 1971, the United States Supreme Court issued a ruling that ended all state-imposed segregation in public schools. This was the same year that T. C. Williams High School located in Alexandria Virginia was integrated. This is the setting for the movie Remember the Titans, starring Denzel Washington who portrays Herman Boone the head coach of the Titans.

Herman Boone is brought in as an assistant coach to join the all white coaching staff. When Herman Boone is appointed head coach over a winning white coach he is reluctant to accept because the same things had happened to him when a white coach had been appointed over him in South Carolina. He finally accepts the head coach position when he sees that the black residents see him as a symbol of pride and respect that is lacking in their community.

The movie starts with a riot after a white storeowner kills a black teenager. This incident underscores the racial tensions that exist as a result of the desegregation of the high school. Coach Boone has to overcome the racism within the team, the coaching staff, and the community to build a winning racially mixed football team.

Leader Description

In the movie we have four primary leaders:

- Herman Boone, the black head coach
- Bill Yoast, the white assistant coach
- Gerry Bertier, the white unofficial leader of the White athletes
- Julius Campbell, the black unofficial leader of the black athletes

Racism and football is the backdrop for the clash of leadership styles and personal perspectives that each man must learn and understand from each other in order to become a winning team.

Herman Boone presents a very tough exterior, had a difficult childhood, and is a seasoned civil rights activist. His background and experiences influence his behavior and his leadership style. When Boone first met the Titan coaching staff he knew that he was not wanted. He was pushed but he did not push back, he remained polite, respectful, and diplomatic. He made clear his agenda was winning football games.

Once he becomes head coach he immediately seizes control and uses his authoritative power to set the tone for the staff and the team. During summer camp he made it clear, "This is a dictatorship, I am the law." He relies heavily on his position of power to accomplish his primary goal of providing structure and order.

Yukl (2006) "Initiating Structure". This category of behavior involves leader concern for accomplishing the task. The leader defines and structures his or her own role and roles of subordinates towards attainment of task goals.

1. Short-term planning
2. Clarifying roles and objectives
3. Monitoring operations and performance" (p. 51)

Herman Boone did not have roots in the community. He was an outsider in every sense of the word. Most members of the white community were waiting for him to fail so they could say they tried and reinstitute Bill Yoast as the head coach of the Titans.

Bill Yoast was a respected member of the community, a winning coach who cared about his players. His background and position in the community gave him a different demeanor and leadership style.

Yukl (2006) "Participative Leadership". Effective managers used more group supervising instead of supervising each subordinate separately. Group meetings facilitate subordinate participations in decision making, improve communications, promote cooperation, and facilitate conflict resolution." (p. 54)

Despite having ten head coach offers from other high schools in northern Virginia he decided to accept the assistant coach position under Boone to support his players. He initially tries to control the situation as an assistant coach but Boone immediately asserts his power and makes it clear who is the head coach. He becomes Coach Boone's conscious, and repeatedly warns him not to push the athletes too far. When he has a chance to get his team back he gives up his personal goal of making it to the hall of fame for the sake of the team. He did it without looking for gratitude or glory. He is even able to complement Coach Boone at the end of the summer camp for his fine work.

Gerry Bertier and Julius Campbell are the unofficial leaders of the white and black teams respectively. They fall into this position because of their athleticism, personal convictions, and need to protect their "brothers". Gerry Bertier ultimately becomes team leader by learning to set aside his prejudice and focus on the team regardless of color. The relationship that develops between Bertier and Campbell lead the way for most of the team to come together.

Yukl (2006) "Peer Leadership". Sometimes a manager asks a subordinate to share in performing certain leadership function and sometimes subordinates perform these functions on their own initiative." (p. 55)

Issues

The leaders are forced to face many issues that are poised to tear the team apart:

- Herman Boone appointed over qualified winning white coach
- Conflicting leadership styles between Herman Boone and Bill Yoast
- Racism in the south at the beginning of the 1970s
- Divided team due to black and white being forced to play together
- Divided coaching staff due to black and white being forced to coach together
- Machinations of School board and other governing bodies
- Coach Boone suspicious of Bill Yoast possibly sabotaging his efforts
- Coach Boone sacrificing too much for the sake of winning
- Coach Boone putting aside his pride to accept help from white assistant coach

The issues listed above fall primarily under two categories, racism and how the leaders deal with the racism. The movie explores these issues in many ways as illustrated elsewhere in this analysis. The racism is overcome by the efforts and open mind of a few that lead the way for the rest of the team and community. As the movie progresses we see that the racism is rooted in uncertainty of the unknown. One significant lesson from the movie is how a common goal and a little trust can bring people with apparent differences together.

Perspectives

It is crucial for a leader to develop an understanding of the perspectives of those under their charge. This film examines the perspectives of many of the persons involved with the true life story of the TC Williams High School Titans. It portrays the perspective of the coaches as they worked to bring together a winning football team, the athletes as they struggled to come to terms with their differences, and the members of the school community as they witnessed their team succeed on the field.

The film focuses on the issue of race and how students' perspectives gradually changed from one of fear to one of understanding. Of particular interest is the relationship between Julius Campbell and Gerry Bertier, an African American defensive player and the white team captain. As the film progresses an animosity between the two slowly changes to trust and friendship as they work at becoming better football players. At the end of the film this friendship is expressed as Gerry, hospitalized from a car accident, asks Julius to visit him at his bedside. When the nurse states that only family is allowed in, Gerry chides her saying 'Alice – can't you see the family resemblance?'

The beliefs and values held by many of the characters change over the course of the film as a result of Coach Boone and Coach Yoast's work. It is clear that their belief in racial equality and love for football helped a team, and ultimately a town, begin to come to terms with the issue of race in America's schools.

Knowledge

Although the film did not examine in detail the knowledge coach Herman Boone possessed before he began his position with the Titans, it shows glimpses into his experience and wisdom. Boone clearly knew and loved football, as evidenced by his hours of dedication and labor. In the scene where he is first introduced to coach Yoast, he describes his past experience as a coach in North Carolina, and his previous winning seasons.

Coach Boone's personal knowledge pertaining to issues of race, group dynamics and relationships was exemplified in a scene where he made his players reseal themselves on the bus based on offensive and defensive teams. This forced players of different races to interact and bond as a team.

Coach Yoast also exhibited an understanding of the dynamics of teamwork and issues of race. During training camp when the athletes were forced to run and re-run drills, he allowed Gerry Bertier and another teammate work through their differences rather than getting involved. This allowed Bertier, a white player, the chance to show support for his black teammates and improved trust on the field.

Actions and Consequences

Throughout the movie there were many individual situations that stemmed from one key issue that was present in the sixties... desegregation. When Boone was appointed to the position of football coach at T.C. Williams he became the visionary of success to the program. His vision for the team from the beginning was to win the championship. Even when he was brought on to be an assistant winning championships was his objective. As a leader one must be a visionary and have an ultimate goal that needs to be accomplished. Situations will always come up that need to be handled in order to accomplish the vision of the leader, which is what was displayed through the movie. Throughout the film, no matter what situations came up, Boone was able to stay focused on the goal of winning the championship which consequently allowed the team to win.

When Boone was appointed head coach over Yoast honesty would have went a long way; shortening the length of time it took for the coaching staff to respect each other. As a leader assumptions need to be put aside in order to accomplish the task at hand. Boone made some quick assumptions regarding Yoast and his belief system and values based on events that were occurring in the city. Ultimately, Boone made a wise decision to go to Yoast at his home and discuss the situation; however he should have been honest instead of arrogant and overbearing. Instead of trying to prove that he was qualified to run the team he should have tried to explain the pride that he was trying to instill in the black people in the town.

Boone's actions caused an instant dissension among the coaching staff. If Boone would have been open about the events surrounding his appointment this dissension might not have occurred and the team might have seen the respect between the two coaches and taken a lead from them. "Attitude reflects leadership" (Julius Campbell) On the other hand honesty in those times might have backfired as well. The negative consequences

you face are that you are laying it all out there for anyone to ridicule or use it against you. Yoast could have easily mocked the situation, or felt as the other members of the town felt and retaliated against Boone.

The hostility of the times should be a factor in every decision that is made. There is no changing the world and it's dynamic in the span of a football season. Boone made a wise decision by not setting out to solve the problems of a city. He didn't ignore the problem of race; he just narrowed the gap of his reach. He realized that he needed to deal with the race issues on the team and not the city. It is good to have a reasonable grasp of what your goals are.

The odds were against Boone and the success of the Titan football team. The school board was scheming against him, and the team was racially divided because of the times. As a leader your integrity needs to be kept in tact, by finding a way to overcome the negative plotting and scheming and still keeping one's value and belief system. Negative consequences are that people can talk about a leader and scheme against that leader even more because they know there will be no retaliation. Positive consequences are the respect you gain as a leader for always staying true to yourself and your vision. Leaders sacrifice a lot for their goals. A leader who has an intense responsibility that affects more than the small situations that they deal with is going to have large sacrifices. Even Yoast allowing his daughter to "hang out" with Boone's family made a social sacrifice, because he knew it was the right thing. Any time you are doing something high profile that affects more than the isolated situation there is going to be a great sacrifice emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

The consequences of undertaking change in a society are great. Any leader who tries to change something in a substantial way is going to face situations in which they have to make huge decisions. The consequences of those decisions are what is going to affect whether the change happens or not. Societal change of the magnitude like we saw in Remember the Titans has great consequences for anyone who is assisting the change. The positive consequences are long term in that the greatest objective was met...desegregation and equality among all people. The negative consequences of decisions that people make are short term, in that they are normally harassed and ridiculed for trying to incite change. Leaders should be separated from the crowd. A leader's role is never easy, but when the ultimate goal is met it is such a satisfaction, no matter what the sacrifices.

References

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