

## Are your leaders the Dallas Cowboys or the Miami Dolphins?

Is leadership at your company more like that of the Dallas Cowboys or the Miami Dolphins?

Team culture is the most important element that must be present to build a winning professional sports franchise. So it's no surprise that it's also the most important component of a winning business.

Think about it: No matter how hard owners, leaders and employees on a team work, the team will only go so far without the great team chemistry that results from a strong culture. While there are no guarantees that you'll win every time if you have good chemistry and a healthy culture, it's certain that you won't go all the way without them.

I'll use the Dallas Cowboys' 2008 season to make my point. I've passionately followed the Cowboys since the mid-'70s, cheering when they won, whining when they lost, and bragging that they were good even when they weren't. I still do this today, much to the chagrin of my co-workers, friends and family.

In my opinion—and in the opinion of many experts—the 2008 Cowboys were initially thought to be the most talented team ever. They had 13 returning Pro Bowl players from the 2007 team, which won 13 games and lost only three. At the beginning of the season, they were the favorite to win the Super Bowl. So why, every other Sunday, did it feel as though either Terrell Owens, star wide receiver and crybaby, Tony Romo, quarterback and Jessica Simpson's boyfriend, or Wade Phillips, laissez-faire head coach, was gouging my heart out with a spoon?

It felt that way because the Cowboys lacked the leadership needed for the team chemistry that drives accountability and results. So they didn't even win enough games to make the playoffs.

In contrast, no one believed the Miami Dolphins would have success in 2008. This was fine with me, because I grew to dislike the Dolphins when my brother, Andy, spent the '70s bragging about their "No-Name Defense" and how great Paul Warfield and Bob Griese were. When Miami had the worst record in the league in 2007,



### ON PERFORMANCE

Gregg Lederman

winning only one game and losing 15, I had something to tease Andy about. But then the Dolphins made a change in leadership.

Much to Andy's delight, they hired Bill Parcells as executive vice president of football operations. Parcells had been coach of the Cowboys and architect of their impressive 2007 roster. Before you could blink, Parcells began to change the leadership of the Dolphins, getting rid of the general manager and the director of player personnel and college scouting.

Within weeks Parcells had hired a new head coach, bringing in someone who not only had unwavering integrity but understood how to develop young players and a culture focused on winning. Who was this coach? Tony Sparano, from the Dallas Cowboys.

The Dolphins finished the 2008 season with an 11-5 record, winning their division and making the playoffs. And they achieved this record using many of the same players they had the year before. The only differences were a new general manager, coach and quarterback. Three individuals can't make such sweeping change happen, can they?

Back to my beloved Dallas Cowboys. Owner and general manager Jerry Jones and coach Phillips just couldn't seem to get it together as leaders. Capable? Sure. Able to instill a good work ethic? No way. Competent? Absolutely. Able to get everyone aiming for a common goal? No way.

Just look at the way Owens was allowed to distract everyone in the locker room with private meetings and accusations that quarterback Romo liked tight end Jason Witten better than him. These antics produced comedy for writers, sportscasters

and fans but frustration and disappointment for the Cowboys. Clearly, Phillips was not an effective leader, one holding players and coaches accountable to meet expectations.

Why did the 2008 Dallas Cowboys fail and the Miami Dolphins succeed beyond everyone's wildest imagination? Let's consider the five-level view of leadership proposed by best-selling author Jim Collins.

Level 5 Leadership is based on the idea that treating people with respect, being selfless and having a powerful commitment to achieving results will bring out the best in people. Level 5 Leaders are stubborn and sometimes ruthless, yet they are humble, ambitious only for the company, and rarely let ego become an obstacle to success. Most important, when Level 5 Leaders accomplish great things, they attribute success to their people, external factors and sheer luck.

Level 5 Leaders lead with the help of disciplined people, disciplined thought and disciplined action—all of which seemed to be missing from the Dallas Cowboys in 2008!

**Level 1:** The highly capable leader makes productive contributions with talent, knowledge and good work habits. Players don't make an NFL team if they don't have talent. Sparano clearly demanded good work habits, while Phillips did not.

**Level 2:** The contributing team member uses individual capabilities to achieve group objectives, working effectively with others. The Dolphins seemed to gel as a team; no single player ever seemed to hog the spotlight. On the other hand, the Cowboys offered a weekly soap opera with the antics of Romo and Owens. Owner Jones seemed to enjoy it, and Phillips couldn't stop it.

**Level 3:** The competent manager organizes people and resources for effective and efficient pursuit of objectives. Egos in the Cowboys locker room made it impossible for the coaches to corral the group and point it toward a common goal.

**Level 4:** The effective leader catalyzes commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, stimulating

higher performance. Chad Pennington, the Dolphins quarterback, was a steady presence week after week and kept the team on an even keel. Romo talked a lot about the ultimate goal but didn't produce the consistent performance that wins big games, especially late in the season when it counted most.

**Level 5:** The Level 5 executive builds enduring greatness with a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. Although the coaches on both teams seemed to demonstrate Level 5 Leadership, the Cowboys' owner, Jones, fell short. He wanted and expected all of the credit if the Cowboys were successful.

The five concepts of leadership I just

applied to football teams also apply in the workplace. As a coach or manager, you're trying to motivate "players" to reach their full potential. And when everyone on the team understands the direction and strategy developed by the owner and manager/coach, success is much easier to achieve.

In the football examples, leadership manifested itself in the inspired—or un-inspired—actions of team members. Traditionally, organizations assess leaders by their actions and behaviors. However, the best way to assess leadership is by the degree to which people around the leaders are aligned and motivated. It is this support and stimulation that drives organizations

to excellent performance instead of mediocrity, to win more and lose less.

Think about your leadership style and the leaders in your organization, and ask yourself: Are you like the Dallas Cowboys or the Miami Dolphins?

*Gregg Lederman, founder and managing partner of Brand Integrity Inc., gives seminars on branding and employee performance. He is a professor at the Simon Graduate School of Business at the University of Rochester and the author of "Achieve Brand Integrity: Ten Truths You Must Know to Enhance Employee Performance and Increase Company Profits." He can be reached at [glederman@brandintegrity.com](mailto:glederman@brandintegrity.com).*