

Achievement and the Sport Leader: When Is Too Much Not Enough?

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**Session 6: Management/Leadership
Presentation (25-minute)**

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In the sport industry, leaders continually experience escalating competition from other sport organizations to discover sustainable revenue generation streams. Moreover, competition reigns for consumers' dollars among a myriad of other non-sport entertainment options. In light of these industry and environmental parameters, it is crucial for sport leaders to continually identify and manage new and creative distribution channels for their particular product. As a result, it may not be surprising that achievement-focused leaders dominate the sport industry. Indeed, even the sport ethos, centered upon performance, competition, and an oft communicated "win at all costs" mentality, is predicated upon achievement. Thus, it would be logical to conclude that such a leader would be highly successful within the sport organization milieu, as it is predominantly focused on achievement-based measures of success.

Identified as one's "meeting or exceeding a standard of excellence or improving personal performance" (Spreirer, Fontaine, & Malloy, 2006, p. 74), a leader's drive for achievement can manifest many positive benefits for him/her and/or for the organization. Achievement-focused leaders can stimulate both innovation and productivity, while adding intangibles such as passion and energy to the workplace. Spreirer et al. (2006) also note that an achievement-focused leader can-if left unchecked-actually harm sustainable progress and performance. When such a leader becomes overly concerned on goal achievement, he/she may compromise interpersonal relations with subordinates, as this concern can often be at the subordinates' expense. In turn, an overt focus on achievement can affect subordinates' trust and morale levels, which decline if stifled and railroaded by such a leader. When the achievement-focused leader is viewed through a developmental lens, and specifically, the Leadership Development Framework (LDF), a more robust understanding can be reached to explain this leader's focus and his/her strengths and limitations.

The LDF represents a model of descriptive human development organized around stages of ego development. Cook-Greuter (1994) conceptualizes the ego as a central processing unit of meaning-making on emotional, behavioral, and cognitive levels, arising from the "dynamic interconnection between one's conception of the self and one's conception of reality" (p. 120). Specifically, the LDF is comprised of seven behavioral stages or action-logics, where each centers on how one's assumptions affect his/her meaning making of "themselves and the world, of thinking, acting, and of interpreting feedback" (Rooke & Torbert, 1999, p. 2). Theoretical links between the achievement-focused leader, as described by Spreirer et al. (2006), can be strongly and appropriately made to the Achiever action logic.

The purpose of this presentation is to fully describe the achievement-focused leader from a developmental perspective, in order to gain a heightened understanding of, and appreciation for, the place of achievement according to transformational leadership (TL), as standardized by Bass and Avolio (1997). To meet this purpose, findings from an exploratory case study describing one Achiever leader's TL effectiveness, as manifested in a non-profit sport organizational setting in the Northeastern American region, are presented. Specifically, qualitative and quantitative findings related to interactions between this Achiever leader and his followers reveal that he enacts a modicum of TL by virtue of his "open communication" methods and his "solid" personal/work relationships with coworkers, and by virtue of his ability to successfully achieve goals related to the organizational mission. As such, this leader is unable to fully and effectively enact TL, particularly due to his inability to stimulate subordinates intellectually and his focus on successful goal achievement at the expense of fostering subordinates' development in an individually considerate manner.

Qualitative and quantitative findings from this case study are shared to conceptually and empirically examine the positive and negative effects that achievement has in the TL process. From these findings, this Achiever leader is differentiated from other leaders studied (e.g., one Individualist and two Strategists), insofar as his level of cognitive complexity and his developmental worldview. As the Achiever leader has the potential to develop to more behaviorally expansive leadership capacities (Rooke & Torbert, 2005), methods of so doing are discussed, as are the subsequent benefits and ramifications.