Using Film to Teach Leadership in Sport Management: Challenging the Millennial Students

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Significance of the Topic to Sport Management

According to the Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA), sport leadership is considered to be one of the traditional areas of sport management education (COSMA, 2013). However, learning and teaching about leadership is a complex process. In large part, the complexity of teaching and learning about leadership is exacerbated by the different leadership concepts that may be taught in a sport management class such as authentic leadership (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004), multi-frame leadership (Bolman & Deal, 1984), situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988), as well as transformational and transactional leadership (Bass, 1985). As such, different learning activities are needed to increase the understanding of different dimensions of leadership.

Review of Relevant Literature

While the traditional lecture and experiential learning may be effective in teaching leadership, another way to convey leadership to the present generation of college students is through the use of sports films. The present generation of college students – often referred to as Millennials – were born between 1982 and 2002 (Elam, Stratton, & Gibson, 2007). Having been raised in an age of media saturation and convenient access to digital technologies, Millennials have distinctive ways of thinking, communicating, and learning (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Prensky 2006). Thus, to meet the needs of Millennials, sport management educators, teaching a class as complex as leadership, must consider additional strategies beyond the traditional lecture method such as studying leadership principles that may be depicted in film.

The use of film can provide a means to generate interactivity and at the same time provide vivid models of both effective and ineffective leadership behavior. Films are a very appealing way to connect the student with course material and enrich the learning experience beyond text-based reading assignments. Films can also enhance learner comprehension by employing blends or mixes of sights and sounds that appeal to variable learning styles and preferences (Miller, 2009). Within the leadership domain, films can present a real-time, multidimensional portrayal of leadership, and show how complex and challenging leadership is or can be by depicting the leader succeeding as well as stumbling. Miller (2009) suggests the most important function in terms of cognitive learning is for the film to supply representational applications for key course ideas.

The analysis of films involves the use of films that portray sports teams experiencing the types of difficulties that might bring a “real life” setting. Gladstein and Feldstein (1983) found that the use of films in the classroom can trigger emotional reaction and personal identification in the viewer. Hoosiers is a basketball movie in which art imitates life. As such, it provides the viewer with competition, obsession, skill, and strategies indigenous to sport. However, it also provides the viewer with a close look at a man who transformed himself from basketball autocrat to transformational leader, changed the culture of a community in need of approbation, and empowered a faltering dissonant group into a productive, successful team. Reflecting basketball’s origins, the transformation of the Hickory Huskers basketball team by Coach Norman Dale is not merely athletic; it is personal and illustrative of a coach’s dual function of leading individuals and groups to the attainment of established goals and mentoring players to deal with personal and developmental challenges (Lee, Chelladurai & Kim, 2015).

Purpose of the Presentation

To be effective, sport management educators must be able to employ a number of different teaching strategies, especially given the characteristics of the Millenial generation. The purpose of this interactive presentation will be to provide steps to effectively implement the use of viewing films, in this case the movie Hoosiers, to teach a sport
leadership class. These steps include the use of excerpts, which will illustrate how leadership concepts may be presented to initiate class discussion, synthesis, and comprehension. Additionally, this presentation will discuss criteria that may be considered when selecting a film for the study of leadership principles.

Potential for Impact on Teaching Quality

It is likely that many educators as well as students may perceive that watching a film for class as being equivalent to having a day off. Others may view it as a “cream puff” assignment. Films are not usually designed with the intent of teaching leadership styles. Films do not reflect a neat and straightforward account of conflicts that may occur in a leadership dynamic. Thus, students need to involve themselves into the film to more fully comprehend the leadership theory being employed. Additionally, the complexities inherent in leadership style may motivate students to closely follow the story line in an attempt to identify the components of the leadership concepts discussed in class. Films are especially useful in leadership education as they can exhibit effective as well as ineffective leadership practices that students can recognize and discuss. Moreover, films can not only assist students to comprehend course concepts, they can stimulate learning at both cognitive and emotional levels. Such comprehension is significant when teaching a leadership course due to the complexities of human behavior (Miller, 2009). As a result, the student’s perceptual and critical thinking skills may be sharpened.

Originality of Teaching Motivations Suggested

Although the use of films has been used in other disciplines such as counseling, organizational behavior, and business management, there seems to be a lack of its use in sport management. The Millenial generation presently comprises a significant portion of college students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate classes. Oblinger and Hagner (2005) indicated that Millennials have shown a need for more varied forms of communication and report being easily bored with traditional learning methods. Educators often try to incorporate ways for students to analyze and synthesize information. An “integrated paper” approach which requires students to apply a conceptual framework in the analysis of a film may be used (Chandler, 1997). The integrated paper is a comprehensive exercise that leads trainees to think at the level of synthesis, moving from interpretation to creative application of a knowledge base of information. Koch and Dollarhide (2000) reported that the incorporation of film-based assignments was “energizing.” Additionally, they indicated that the use of film-based assignments increased learning and rapport in the classroom. Additionally, several articles to date have discussed unique aspects of using films, such as richness and variety of content, emotive substance, and flexibility for use in assignments making them appropriate for learning and training in the classroom (Chandler, 1997; Gladstein & Feldstein, 1983; Koch & Dollarhide, 2000). Thus, the use of films as a teaching strategy in a leadership class may allow students of the Millennial generation to more fully grasp leadership concepts, thereby increasing the quality of the instruction.

Contributions to the Body of Knowledge

Educators cannot assume that students will understand concepts by using only one teaching strategy. While the traditional lecture strategy is commonly used, the present generation of Millennials is not only savvy technologically, they tend to adopt independent and autonomous learning styles. This impacts a wide range of educational choices and behaviors, from “what kind of education they buy” to “what, where, and how they learnt” (Carlson, 2005, para. 5). Film-based assignments can supplement traditional methods by providing application and synthesis of knowledge (Hudock & Warden, 2001). Other variations exist that incorporate films into the curriculum. The use of films provides a unique opportunity for the Millennial generation student in a sport leadership class to view them either in or out of class while still allowing the educator to test the understanding and application of various leadership concepts.

References

