

Will You Manage: The Necessary Skills To Be A Great Gaffer

Book review

Introduction:

To be a successful boss you must:

- Have a clear and compelling vision for your club
- Carry it out through fine man-management skills
- Stay abreast of the latest training techniques and methods
- Have the last word in tactical innovation
- Well-versed in club politics
- Negotiate the dense web of egos and vested interests
- Handle the media with total confidence

The average tenure of a manager was 2.7 years in 1992: by 2005 it had dropped to 1.7 years.

Why do people become soccer managers in a career where most are doomed to fail?

The answer is both a calling and a compulsion.

120 managers were heart-tested and between 40 and 50 percent of them had cardiovascular risk factors that needed to be addressed.

Great management is an act of craftsmanship, a mastery of many disparate roles. Soccer management is a profession of often overwhelming loneliness.

Why do you manage?

Simple. It is for the thrill of conducting your eleven-man orchestra, to see them flow endlessly from one end of the pitch to the other.

Obsession:

Because soccer is in you, not in your veins – that's too shallow; it's in your bone marrow.

Obsession is important not only because it underpins a team's winning mentality, but because it's the one area in which soccer fans feel closest to their managers.

Soccer obsession generally falls into two camps. There's the Bill Shankly camp, nothing concerns them other than the working of their own club. Their approach has both innocence and arrogance. His focus was only on his players, their needs and their concerns.

The other camp is like school students studying for exams – preparation is feverish. Planning every possible detail of what could happen; focusing very much on what the opponent is all about and what they might do.

Why are soccer managers so obsessed with something as trivial as soccer?

Complexity and fear ---

Soccer has a deceptive, and therefore seductive, simplicity. That which initially seems easy, become more difficult the deeper you explore them. Perhaps the greatest beauty of soccer is the sheer randomness that lies beneath its apparently sedate surface.

An accomplished soccer player must, together with adequate technique and specific mental and physical qualities, possess soccer intelligence, insight in the game, and recognize the ever-changing situation. He must be able to choose very quickly the most efficient solution out of the many possible solutions.

2 more qualities that many successful managers possess are the unsatisfied hunger for glory, and a desire to have everything under control.

One very good piece of advice for managers is to be able to ‘switch off’. If you ‘switch off’, you improve your ability to observe, and to actually step back and realize what is not going well and how to change it. Too often managers retreat so deeply into their own logic that their choice makes sense only to themselves. They have denied themselves the crucial room for breath and calm reflection. The art of good management is delegation.

Vision:

One vehicle truly carrying you forward is your vision. To be a truly great manager, you must have a dream. What you are doing is dealing with problems every day. The main problem is sorting out problems, and you need to be prepared for that.

As a manager joining an ailing club, you must both see and believe a road to your club’s rude health that few others do; a quality that makes you not so much a visionary as a doctor. You must make a quick, honest and forensic diagnosis of its ills.

There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are unknown knowns, there are things that we do not know. There are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don’t know we don’t know.

It’s one thing to assess a problem before you; it’s quite another when you don’t realize that you’re incapable of seeing the whole picture. There are occasions in soccer – the unknown unknowns – when a manager doesn’t know where he should be looking for hope, or for trouble.

Alex Ferguson (Manchester United) said his aim in management has been to always lay a foundation that will make a club successful for years, or even decades.

The 5 most important questions that you will ever ask about your organization:

- What is the mission
- Who are the customers
- What do the customers value
- What were the results
- What is the plan

Without a plan, lack of quality and continuity will lead to the fall of many organizations.

Soccer at one level is all about branding. The key to establishing a successful product is working out its unique selling point – this can be the values and the history of a particular club. As a manager, you’re a salesman; you generally have a particular style in which you like to win, or a theory of play. Soccer might not just be about winning, it might be about looking the part. Today you’re the best and tomorrow you’re a jackass, or vice-versa.

Great managers can see things before others due to their experience and expertise. Bob Paisley of Liverpool the unraveling of the rich Liverpool legacy a few years before the results were there for everyone to see. The best managers can see qualities in players that the player does not even see in himself; using the 3 Ps of **passion, perfection, and potential**.

Sometimes managers miss out on players because they don't look the part. The opposite is also true where the mistake is made because the player *seems* to have the necessary qualities or characteristics to be successful. Some managers still pick players based on a hunch. A detailed analysis provides a much better success rate than just wishing and hoping. Invest time to get to know the player as a person and as a soccer player. Always ascertain the qualities you are looking at for the qualities that you need in your team. Inform the player as to how you see his role within the team.

Presence:

For a manager to have presence, he must have a way about him. You want the whole to be greater than the sum of its parts. It's the little things that together tip into a big thing. The cumulative effect must be compelling. Management is mostly the same throughout – it's the extra 10 percent that's the special bit.

Strategy:

There's a persistent argument that the art of sport at the highest level isn't so different in tactical terms from the art of war. The rigorous attention to detail prevails in both arenas. Sun Tzu in his **The Art of War** describes successful tactics for war that can be applied similarly to sports. One of Sun Tzu tenets is to 'determine the enemy's plans and you will know which strategy will be successful and which will not.' Another of his ideas is 'to win the closest contests, you can't go out there and impose your style on the opposition. You have to set traps for them (counter attack). He who is prudent and lies in wait for an enemy who is not, will be victorious Speed is the essence of war. Take advantage of the enemies unpreparedness ... strike him where he has taken no precautions.'

When working under great pressure to perform, the conservatism of tactics will usually appear. When winning is the only option for survival in such a volatile environment, then questions of the beautiful game often go out the window. Managers become afraid to play flamboyant soccer for fear they may lose. Games played in that manner fall rather short of expectation.

Brazil in the 1994 World Cup Final had to win ,, . they had not won for 24 years ... they did not have the right to lose. Thus, the manager took an overly defensive approach, uncharacteristic of Brazilian soccer, but the pressure to win was overwhelming, even to the extent of changing the way Brazil played.

A team can be chosen according to 2 points of view: either you have 11 individuals, who owing to sheer class and natural ability are entitled to beat their opponents – or you have 11 average players who have to be integrated into a particular concept or plan.

Soccer is a sport that has survived a long time on 2 obsessions: **the cult of the orthodoxy and the cult of the hero**. The cult of the **orthodoxy** is the oldest thing in the game. The cult insists that, even when you are using an unsuccessful system, you must persist with it at all costs. Familiarity doesn't breed contempt in soccer, it breeds contentment. The cult of the **hero** insists that whenever a team wins a great victory there must be a single talisman within the team.

The history of tactics is the history of 2 interlinked tensions: **aesthetics vs results** on the one side and **technique vs physique** on the other. We can also add a third tension in the history of tactics; that of **swagger vs sleight**. Swagger is when you dictate terms, you play your style, overwhelming the opposition with your brawn, brilliance, or maybe both.

Even Rinus Michels, whose attacking brand of soccer still graces the daydreams of millions, grudgingly admitted that great teams must largely be built upon negative foundations. Of the 3 functions within the

team-building process – defending, building-up and attacking – the defensive function has the highest priority when creating the balance in the team. To not let the opponent get into their rhythm of play through being well-organized as a team is the basis for your own build-up and attack.

Brian Clough had a keen appreciation of structure – every team should have a strong ‘spine’ – center forwards (strikers), center backs and keeper.

They never allowed the other team to settle: for them, the emphasis was always upon disruption, on buffering opponents out of rhythm. As soon as an attacker had evaded one obstacle, he was faced with another; eventually succumbing to frustration, victim of a technique known as the ‘full-court press’. (Chicago Bulls)

Chelsea’s Mourinho managed to create a series of extra barriers between the opponent and the Chelsea goal by making each of his players occupy a slightly staggered position on the field. Each of them stood deeper than the other, so that instead of facing one defensive screen, you were facing three.

Mourinho’s Inter Milan team of 2009-2010 showed the same defensive resilience combined with moments of counter-attacking brilliance. Quick transition is the most important aspect in the UEFA Champions League – quickly structuring to defend, or exploring the opponent with speed when the ball is regained. **Transition speed is vital.**

The two key elements in the UEFA Champions League are the transition and, from a coaching perspective, the last 10-15 minutes. Approximately 46 % of the goals scored in open play stemmed from fast breaks or counter-attacks.

Some teams choose to ‘park a bus’ in front of their goal – patience and circulation soccer - passing the ball within the team until an opening develops to play the ball in deep, become the way to unlock the packed defense.

Faced by a steady line of defense, Barcelona works the ball with one, two, three touches at a time across the width and depth of the field. When there is no direct attacking option, the sideways pass allows the team to retain possession. When to deliver the killer-blow is a matter of immaculate timing.

Momentum is the force that dictates the flow of a match; it comes from the flow of energy. A player can *feel* things going for or against them, *sensing* who holds the balance of power at key moments in a game.

Italian managers have traditionally understood this better than any of their counterparts. In Serie A, teams were only expected to play for sixty of the ninety minutes, the rest of the while keeping their movement deliberately downbeat. In England you go into tackles to win them! In Italy, the priority is first and foremost not to get hurt tactically. This leads to more ‘tactical fouls’. In the Serie A in the 1990s, if the home team did not score within the first twenty minutes, then the game would very likely finish in a goalless draw.

Sun Tzu insists on disciplined deployment of troops, on rigid retention of tactical shape. ‘One defends when his strength is inadequate; he attacks when it is abundant.’

Communication:

Managers must communicate well. They must get their point across effectively to their players . This can be done in many different ways. It is often said that a manager earns his money at half-time; that only the top managers can produce the inspired advice that can turn around games that their teams are losing.

The art of communication is the art of setting the tone, and the very best do it without saying a word. The team sheet tells who is playing and where; it is the manager's tool to announce the game plan. Selection, and/or lack of selection can sometimes have a profound impact on the team. The team sheet may show the initiative of the manager or the conservatism; either way it is the message about how the team intends to play. If there is an imbalance of defensive players, the game plan is to defend and play on the break. If the attacking players dominate the sheet, the manager intends to instill his will on the opponent.

In the professional game, money speaks volumes. Fining a player a certain amount of money will send a message that the behavior will not be tolerated and that there will be a price to pay.

Rules are another way to set the tone before you've barely spoken a word to your players. Team rules establish a certain discipline and expected behavior – punctuality, a dress code, a ban on mobile phones at meal times, and a new schedule ahead of training.

An interesting quote concerning communication when players of different countries, who speak different languages, become teammates: 'when soccer brains meet, you don't need words.'

Chang Yi, a Chinese scholar says, "if the enemy general is obstinate and prone to anger, insult and enrage him, so that he will be irritated and confused, and without a plan will recklessly advance against you." (Sir Alex Ferguson is a master of using the media to wind up an opposing coach)

A nervous bunch of schoolboy soccer players were on the bus to play their hated rivals. The coach noticed the fear in the faces of his players. His message to them was simple: "you're going to play for an hour. There will be 22 of you on the field. Each of you will have the ball for no more than 2 minutes at most; maybe no more than 10 or 15 touches. Make them count."

It was as much what he didn't say, as what he did; if you're preparing your team for a great campaign, it's best to keep it short. It distracts them from the scale of the task ahead, and gives them a sense of high urgency but low pressure.

Then there is the "hairdryer treatment" of Sir Alex Ferguson which consists of a sustained blast of Glaswegian rage only a few inches from the guilty players' faces.

It's always very important to give your players instructions that they are able to follow. This means that the language must be understood by the players; don't talk over their heads and don't be confusing. Clear, concise communication is the best.

You need only 3 things to be an absolutely exquisite communicator. The first one is **to know what outcome you want**. The second is that **you need flexibility in your behavior** – you need to generate lots of different behaviors to find out what responses you get. The third is **you need to have enough sensory experience to notice when you get the response that you want**.

Effective communication in training requires that you **first show a new technique**, then **show why that technique is of value** and finally **what all the options are**; allowing the players then to decide what's best. (guided discovery -- showing, not telling)

Empathy

"How do I build a player up? - by first knocking him as low as I can. I have to start from scratch with him." By asking many questions and getting to know the personal characteristics of the player, it establishes a relationship that the player realizes that you care about him. Then they will do whatever it

takes to help the team become a winning team. You must know what makes them feel proud or frail, what makes them falter or follow you. Empathy is the key.

Player power by contract law is defined, broadly speaking, as the balance of power between the parties to an agreement; in this case, between the player and his club.

Soccer management is of infinitely greater complexity than playing the game: coaching, coaxing a squad of twenty-odd players to immortality is tougher than the mere task of scoring a volley in the final of the UEFA Champions League.

To be capable of reaching the absolute world class, a coach must have gone through an extended experience as a top-level player. The highest levels of soccer are a particularly rarefied atmosphere, and you must have grown up knowing the nuances in order to flourish as a coach.

Modern day management is less about tactics and more about man-management. Managers fall into three motivational groups. The first, the **affiliative managers**, need to be liked more than they need to get things done. They act to boost their own popularity. The second group, **managers motivated by the need to achieve**, aren't worried about what people think about them. They focus on setting goals and reaching them, but they put their achievement and recognition first. The third group, **institutional managers**, are interested above all in power. Recognizing that you get things done in organizations only if you can influence the people around you, they focus on building power through influence rather than through their own individual achievement. People in this third group are the most effective, and their direct reports have a greater sense of responsibility, see organizational goals more clearly, and exhibit more team spirit.

In summary, nice guys finish last. It's best to maintain a degree of distance from your followers. What works today is not guaranteed to work tomorrow. There are no guarantees. The manager must constantly remain on the alert. Every day there can be internal or external factors that can influence the team mentality of the players. This causes a constant change of the tension level.

Four personality types (A,B,C,D) with different strengths and performance anxiety.

A has great ambition and high performance anxiety

B has great ambition, but is not afraid of failing

C has little ambition, but is afraid of making mistakes

D has little ambition, but is also not bothered about failing

A is the type that is fine in ordinary league matches but fades when it really matters

B is, not surprisingly, the type who makes the most of his resources. **B** dares to excel when it really matters. In order to create a **B** culture, **we must stimulate ambition and reduce fear.**

The most common personality type by far – some 80 % - was type **A**.

How does a manager handle the 80% of type **A** personalities ?

Beyond the player there is a person who likes to be considered, he likes to be treated properly, and if you can get this kind of relationship in the right way then they will give everything for you. If you treat people well, they will respond to what you're asking from them.

Elite players may sometimes be compared to racehorses – highly gifted yet highly sensitive to changes in their immediate atmosphere.

(Good anecdote) Bob Paisley, famous Liverpool coach of years ago, once arranged for one of his players, Tommy Smith, a hard man of formidable reputation to be given “ the wrong pre-game meal ... so that he was in a suitably bad mood for the match.”

Gianfranco Zola, former great Italian player and EPL manager says:
“you just talk to them, motivate them... sometimes, tell them off; it’s an everyday job, you need to be there all the time, you can’t afford to let it slip out of your hands. It’s constant motivation.”

Zola says as a player: “I think one of the biggest things I wanted when I was a player was when the manager would come to me and he gave me responsibilities; when he said, ‘Okay, today you need to produce something special’. I felt great about that.

Compliance to orders:

‘Welcome to Boot Camp’ – an iron-fisted philosophy, the need to be strong and muscular, but not very elastic. A one size fits all approach that involves excessive ranting. The expectation is that they will obey unquestioningly.

It’s all in the delivery; if you use anger to teach, so that people see cause and effect in their misbehavior, that is a consequence-and-cost response. Punishment never works to change or improve behavior. Consequences and cost offer guidance – the only effective route to discipline.

You need an underbelly of fear all the time as a manager. It’s very easy to lose the dressing room once the players feel that they can do what they want, without any consequence.

An effective manager must have a sense of peerless intuition where players are concerned. Brian Clough said “I can tell from the moment I see someone in the dressing room what his mood is and what I can expect from today and how I need to handle him. You have to sense their moods, read their minds and second-guess them. And then the trick is to say exactly the right thing at exactly the right moment. Or you just shut up and sit in silence.”

You must have rules for everybody, but you can’t treat everyone the same. Being all things to all men is something that requires a great deal of concentration; it also calls for great acting skills. You must be able to adapt.

A manager’s fidelity to his players is the core of his authority. Loyalty is the big key to Sir Alex Ferguson’s success.

Luck

Luck doesn’t just play a role in the outcome of a game, but an enormous one. And the best managers are those who not only accept this begrudgingly, but embrace it.; who understands that they’re one agonizing degree removed from the action, that once the game is underway they’re largely as helpless as the people in the stands. Accepting their own helplessness is something that traditionally, managers don’t do all that well, and so there’s a certain kind of bravery in that. Fortune seems to favor the brave.

The fact that luck plays a role in the outcome of a game almost makes a mockery of all the hard work that the manager puts into the preparation.

Diplomacy

Defined as skill and tact in handling affairs or dealing with people, sometimes referred to as 'playing the game'.

The three main threats to a manager's authority at a soccer club;

The role of the **owners** in the running of the club and their influence in soccer matters.

The adaptation of **new management structures** without a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

The setting of **unrealistic short-term expectations**.

Resilience

Rude, ruthless and xenophobic are words used in reference to Sir Alf Ramsey's poor public image in spite of winning the 1966 World Cup for England in England.

For the best interests of the team, you are sometimes forced to make unpopular decisions. This is to the regret of the fans and media who do not comprehend it. You need to have a well-trained tactical eye to recognize the balance within a team. A coach watches a match through different eyes than fans or the media.

Player power is one of the most significant threats to a manager's precarious position. It is essential that you manage well; that you manage with will. The role of the manager has often become that of the scapegoat – somebody has to take the blame.

Sometimes nothing makes you more valiant than a lost cause. What's more, the club had the peculiar comfort that comes when you know that a situation can't get any worse, and was all the healthier for it. (facing relegation or having been relegated)

Management seemed one part glory, nine parts survival; since most managers went through their careers without a sniff of silverware, the one thing that any of them could reliably be judged by was their ability to hang on.

Try his best he did, but at the end of the season Zola would leave West Ham, his performance having failed to satisfy the club's new owners. Under his leadership, West Ham's Premier League status was threatened, but ultimately remained intact; something which, indeed, can be said for Zola's own dignity.

In the end, that's all that most managers can wish for.