

Winning Big in Business: The NFL Model

A 350 lb defensive lineman faces a 270 lb tackle. The ball is snapped & in an instant the bigger man is on the ground. Part of the tackles preparation involved watching game films. "I realized that when a man that big begins to move forward there is an instant when he must be on one foot. I waited until the foot came up & that's when I took him"

Many NFL teams plan the first 15 + plays of a game. These plays and many others are practiced as a team and mentally by some players months before the season begins, the night before the game and often seconds before the snap. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, a sports SWOT analysis, flows from the mind of both the offense and the defense as they are playing and in strategy meetings with coordinators before games. For the quarterback the mental screen is always running resulting in continual adjustments. They attempt to see everything and make no errors. All this preparation in, spite of the fact that they will have numerous opportunities to run play after play in the attempt drive to the goal-line, score and win the game. Each play requires a tremendous effort. One might wonder what they would do if they only had one play to win a game.

In many scenarios today, business has only one shot at a touchdown.

Learning from the mistakes of others can save you a fortune.....let's take a look at one.

Investment bankingA Managing Director lamented that two of his associates had blown a deal, he felt, because they were not prepared to deal with a difficult client. "I should have done it myself" he said. "When you did the role-play with them prior to their meeting" I said "did you miss their weaknesses". You guessed it...no prep. Had they looked at the company, the principles, personalities, understood the individual goals and objectives of those involved and asked the right questions, they may have been in a better position to give the client what he wanted rather than what THEY WANTED. Is it possible that companies are using potential clients as a practice field?

Know the other, know yourself:
 One Hundred challenges without danger;
 Know not the other and yet know yourself:
 One triumph for one defeat;
 Know not the other and know not yourself:
 Every challenge is certain peril."

"Know the other and know yourself:
 Triumph without peril;
 Know Nature and know the Situation:
 Triumph completely"

- Sun Tzu

PPS Preparation for a Competitive Edge

In all but a few situations, greater product knowledge does not translate into a competitive edge. When looking at top performing companies we must assume the highest level of product knowledge. The edge is somewhere else. It's often **invisible**.

When it's discovered it is usually found in relationships begun with the client feeling that you understand her/him, their challenges, and that you have a sense of the real dynamics going on in their world. But lets back up & see how a change in strategy by the MD might have resulted in a more favorable outcome.

Imagine for a moment that this company had a **coaching culture** rather than a traditional management culture. The traditional Management culture assigns a task and reviews a performance after completion. Here's what the dialogue would sound like in a Coaching culture.

MD...Both of you will be handling the XYZ pitch. I was wondering how you planned to approach Mr. XYZ. Let's imagine that I am Mr. XYZ., run the pitch by me.

A1....We've done this before, why don't you just give us some suggestions.

MD...The reality is that you might have some new ideas on how to approach this kind of client. In any event, **wouldn't you agree** that running through the pitch, in advance, makes sense? [**You don't??** If **no** is the answer, you have learned a lot already] **You continue** "Let's hear your pitch."

[MD must avoid the temptation to jump in with his ideas. He must role play MR XYZ and he should avoid ANY critique of the pitch. The key here is to get your team talking. Your role requires really careful listening and creative questioning. [See Dorothy Leeds' book Smart Questions] This will provide some obvious benefits to MD. 1. He will become, or maybe not, comfortable with the thought process, planning and preparation of his team; 2. He will quickly identify errors in approach, strategy as well as the ability of the team to respond to challenges from XYZ. He or she will identify areas of team development that can be focused on in training.

Remember that an NFL offense practices a play over and over. The MD'S coaching continues.

MD...Can you foresee anything that might get in the way or delay you both from being ready for this presentation. [Here the MD is letting them make the commitment to a completion date themselves. This clearly places the responsibility on the team members.

Can you anticipate any objection, question, response or affect that might concern you or that you are not prepared to reply to?

Have you identified any internal relationship issues that could affect the deal?

KEY MD QUESTION.....DO YOU NEED ANYTHING FROM ME?

Rather than checking in with the team with "Are you ready" type questions, Mr. MD simply says "Need anything from me"

This strategy works well in numerous situations. It eases the stress of delegation and minimizes error.

Sound a little off in the clouds? OK. Try this one.

An M&A firm brings a buyer to the table at the request of the founder of a very successful manufacturing business. At the closing the founder decides not to sell.

In looking at what could possibly have gone wrong I asked what in fact the M&A firm was selling. They replied "we were selling the manufacturing business". I suggested that what they were really selling was the owners child. He had probably done for that business what one would do for a child including changing its diaper. The numbers all worked so it had to be something else. I suspect that had more care been taken at the beginning of the deal, gaining an understanding of hidden dynamics that the closing would have gone smoothly.

Use your trusty SWOT analysis BEFORE you approach your next process.

Strengths [yours and theirs], Weaknesses [strategies you must improve and places you client needs help], Opportunities [those missed that are recoverable, those in the present and those that are on the horizon] Threats [from your perspective what is the cost of not changing your strategy and from your clients point of view what will it cost NOT to take you proposal]



From a personal performance assessment, answer the following for yourself, your associates and **your clients**:

Does the way you talk to yourself effect the outcome of the deal?

Do you know what it feels like when you are at your best?

How well do you prepare to compete?

How quickly do you recover from a set back?

How strategic is your communication?

Do you have a networking strategy?

Can you become more influential?

What does your company look like in 2011?