



Management Lessons from Super Bowl XXXVII

During a conversation on the Friday afternoon prior to Super Bowl XXXVII I was asked who I thought would win. My instant response was the Oakland Raiders, while also saying the only way Tampa could win would be if they crossed Oakland up a bit and executed flawlessly. If you watched the game, you know that's exactly what they did and why I could not have been more wrong in my confident prediction of a Raider victory. There are a number of lessons we can take as managers from yesterday's somewhat surprising game.

1) PLAYING YOUR GAME, EXECUTING FLAWLESSLY

Tampa played their game to near perfection. Even when things looked shaky--like Brad Johnson's early passes--they did not give up on their game plan. The plays were practiced and to some extent proven; it was just a matter of making them work, in San Diego.

Not everything always goes as one expects they will. Frequent and timely analysis tells us if our "plays" are working; if our assumptions were correct, if our processes and methods deliver the results we expected. If the plans are working then make the physical adjustments to execute them better, faster without losing the core of the plan. If Tampa had micromanaged their first offensive series and changed their approach, the outcome would have been different.

2) ADJUST WHEN ONE HAS TO

Often we understand things are not as they should be that change is necessary. This moment came for the Raiders in the middle of the first half. Jerry Rice was wearing a microphone, while sitting on the sidelines with the other Raider receiver Jerry Porter – a guy who earns his living by catching passes!! – said to him "we gotta start pounding the ball". The plays Oakland was trying to run simply were not working and their players knew it. Only a change in strategy of significance could change the results. Yet Oakland's coaching staff did not make any appropriate changes in their game strategy.

Arrogantly insisting that what we do WILL work – despite evidence to the contrary – is one of the biggest mistakes management teams make. Knowing *why* to change is as crucial as knowing *what* and *when*. Oakland's failure to recognize and act on major game trends assured they could not win the game. Both Teams determined to stick with their plan. Only one team's management was right. It is all a matter of management perspective.

3) GREAT STARS ARE TEAM PLAYERS

Star players oftentimes get undeserved reputations for being selfish players. One of the most maligned is Keyshawn Johnson who has been publicly referred to as Me-shawn. If you watched him carefully you would have seen him throwing monster blocks on every significant running play the Bucs had Super Bowl Sunday. Keyshawn came to win, and his taking out +300 lb lineman as well as 250 lb linebackers over and over created a running attack that secured Tampa's victory

and 124 rushing yards for Michael Pittman. Keyshawn is one of the truly great football players because he approaches the game with a strong intensity to win and displays that through his team work and personal success. He may not be popular, but he is a winner.

In the pursuit of excellence people – particularly leaders – have to occasionally take unpopular stances and demand superior performance from their peers. These leaders earn the respect and even entitlement to carry on as they do because their actions and deeds mirror their words. There are some who may not like the most vocal and demanding within an organization, but these high achievers are our most valued resource because they can be expected to make routine contributions to an organization's success. There is a price to pay for greatness, and if we want to win our version of a Super Bowl we have to be prepared to pay it and demand it from others.

4) SUSTAINING IT

By this time next week, Tampa Bay's winning the Super Bowl is old news and in a few short months there will be 31 teams hell bent on taking them down. It is very tough to repeat as champs in a competitive environment, and no matter how great a season Tampa had it will only be one championship if they can't build on what they have. The Buccaneers suffered through 27 years of trying to get there; they will soon find out it is more difficult staying on top than even the torturous road to a great victory was.

You maybe on top of your game or your team is fighting a long uphill battle to correct past wrongs. Whatever the situation you and your team are expecting and expected to deliver even greater success. That's a heavy responsibility and it can only be fulfilled by realizing that you can't stand back to admire your work because the demands for continuous improvement are greater for winners than also-rans.

One can argue the better team did not win Super Bowl XXXV II, but there is no doubt that the team that *played* better was dominant. We all must constantly assure that our teams play that dominantly well.

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