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# IDEABRIDGE



The IdeaBridge White Paper Series:  
Winning on the Playing Field of Business  
Adaptation from “The Packer Way”

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## WINNING ON THE PLAYING FIELD OF BUSINESS

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### Summary

What follows are some compelling insights from "The Packer Way", a book by Ron Wolf and Paul Attner, published by St. Martin's Press. The book gives an excellent insight into the coaching and management techniques of this famous coach. This summary is an excellent primer on what it takes to win in a professional sports organization. The sports example is directly analogous to today's business environment.

### Asking Questions

- I discovered much of what I needed to know by asking questions. Sounds simple, but I don't think managers and business owners use this methodology enough. Just keep asking "Why" and "How" until you're satisfied that you understand the issues.
- I don't mind being told I'm wrong. By asking questions, you won't always hear good news, but at least you give yourself an opportunity to have your mind opened to new information, new approaches, new avenues and new ideas. And that can only make you a better businessperson.

### Finding the Right Person for the Job

- That's what managing is all about – putting the right people in the right positions, where they can use their strengths and not be hindered by their weaknesses. For example: If you have a good detail person who doesn't have an engaging personality, why would you want that person in a job that deals constantly with the public?
- One employee kept coming into my office and complaining that, because he wasn't "my guy," he wasn't faring as well as he had hoped. I simply explained to him that once he showed he could consistently do his job, that alone would make him "my guy."
- Yet companies repeatedly make the horrific mistake of rewarding overachievers with promotions to leadership positions even though they possess no leadership qualities. How does that make any sense at all? It hurts the employee and his staff as well as the overall performance of the company.

### Sending the Message/Letting People Go

- I have little tolerance for those who constantly have their hand out, wanting additional increases. These people generate an unhealthy buzz within the organization. I use a direct old-fashioned approach deal with this problem.
- I had better not hear from a third party that you're unhappy. You need the fortitude to come to me and make your complaint. Whenever I hear about an employee who's complaining, I seek him out immediately and tell him, "Let me set the record straight. My door is always open and you need to come in and talk to me. There's no excuse for failing to air your problems." These people are a cancer to an organization. Get rid of them.



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- There's an obligation that comes with the position, including an understanding that unless you do your best, you won't have a job.
- If you're doing something I don't like, I don't go home and agonize over it or send you a message. I tell you straight-out what's wrong and how I expect you to correct it. The main priority is to do everything we can to succeed. No one in our organization should ever be able to say they didn't know whether I thought they were doing well or needed to improve. They know, because I immediately tell them the score.
- Everyone should understand that no matter his seniority or loyalty, lack of performance will lead to dismissal. Firing someone is never pleasant, but if people believe they can coast without producing, the organization won't function correctly. Sentimentality can't be allowed to cloud decision-making when dealing with performance evaluations.
- We knew we couldn't develop an obsession with "winning today" if we had an organization filled with whiners. You can't move forward if employees are pulling you back. As a manager, it is imperative you identify those who want to work with you and those who will always be unhappy. And you must unload anyone who would rather be negative than productive.
- Eliminate those employees who are trying to survive instead of trying to improve. You don't want an office full of people doing only what it takes to preserve a paycheck. They work against everything you hope to accomplish. You must educate your staff so members understand the proper work ethic and ambition you expect.
- No one wanted to deal with the harsh reality that unless losing became repulsive to everyone, the winning would never begin. Someone had to stand up and say, "Mistakes no longer will be tolerated. No exceptions. And if you keep making them, you're gone."
- I consider myself a fair person to work for, but if you aren't capable of upholding your responsibilities, then I'm duty-bound to find someone else who can. I think fairness is determined by the clarity in which I explain procedures and the consistency in which I enforce them.
- We want people to know that while they may be talented, if they don't want to be a team player, we'll fire them. Period.
- Rid yourself of the whiners and yappers who impede improvement through negative behavior. Those who receive a fair hearing on their complaints and still don't buy into the company policy need a hall pass to an exit interview.
- I expect my employees to buy into this operating tenet. If they don't live up to our expectations, they'll soon be looking through the want ads.
- My faith, however, had better be rewarded. If you tell me you'll be in a certain place at a certain time to do a certain job and you don't show up, it'll eventually get back to me. It's just like excuses. Give me too many of them, and you've begun your walk to the unemployment line.
- The chronic whiners, yappers and back-stabbers need to be identified and dealt with, because if they aren't, they'll impede your ability to obtain your goals. If they continue to insist that cynicism and backstabbing is their right, let them talk about it over a cup of coffee at the unemployment office.



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### Making the Tough Calls

- When making the tough decisions, I always try to set aside any emotion and look at what I'm doing from a company standpoint.
- The further you rise in the corporate structure, the less frequently you can be a good guy. If you have a proven record and you're comfortable with what you're achieving and your ultimate goal is to be a winner, you had better do things your way instead of trying to accommodate people by showing you're a nice guy.
- A good manager must make difficult decisions and absorb the resulting criticisms. So often, we don't want to offend or risk unfavorable publicity. However, as long as you always put the company's welfare first, you'll be motivated to do what's right, regardless of the reaction.
- It's critical that you make the difficult decisions and resist the temptation to overlook exceptions or allow a bad situation to continue just to avoid a tough conversation or controversy inside the company.

### Management Ideas

- To be a top-notch manager, you must have a style that's both effective and consistent, not one that changes on whim. And you should surround yourself with employees who can understand and flourish under your management philosophies.
- If your philosophies of management are communicated correctly, no one should ever be surprised by your actions or the way the company evolves.
- You need to develop a business without deadwood – whether that means eliminating unnecessary employees, unnecessary layers of management, or unnecessary divisions or products. One of the worst mistakes a company can make is to undertake too much, and do none of it well, rather than focusing on a few areas and make those the best they possibly can be.
- It's obviously impossible and foolish for you to try to do everything. Your strength and determination can only achieve so much. So your future success becomes directly linked to the leaders you hire to function under you. Finding and hiring top leaders is an incredibly important process that will give life to everything you want to accomplish.
- Micromanaging is an insidious approach where bosses absolutely want to know every detail of what's happening in their organization, have to sign off on everything and undermine the authority of their top assistants by interfering with and overriding their decisions.
- The best managers deal with their mistakes quickly and decisively. Don't be afraid to acknowledge your errors. If anything, the honesty is appreciated by employees, who understand you're not trying to mislead them.



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- As a manager, you have to realize not everyone automatically understands what it means to be dedicated. I don't want our people guessing at what it takes to meet our standards. Tell them straight-out and model our desired behaviors.
- Successful businesses must have a proper balance of strength throughout the firm. Organizations with quality leaders and a weak support staff are likely to perform at less-than-peak efficiency.

### Leadership

- People are looking for you to provide decisive, strong leadership, and you can't fulfill their hopes by dancing around the obvious. If you don't have the guts to stand on your beliefs, I don't think you give yourself or our company a chance to maximize its potential. Your role is to give direction, and if you can't clearly define what's important to you and to our company, you risk establishing a confusing atmosphere that hinders production and success.
- A leader performs when it is time to perform. No lip service, no hollow promises, no words without substance. That's what leadership is all about.
- Once you prove your way is successful, you have people saying, "This guy knows what he's talking about. Let's tag along." Once you see even a slight change in what had been such a negative picture, it's amazing how attitudes change for the better. That makes everything you want to do in the future so much easier to sell. You've got people buying in faster – and the ones that don't become more and more isolated and are subjected to more and more peer pressure.

### Winning!

- Winning must be the obsession that drives your business. Winning must be the obsession that determines every decision you make, that guides your thought process, that pushes you to be aggressive when everyone else is hanging back.
- Winning is the attitude that gives you and your enterprise the "edge," that confidence that separates you from your competition and keeps pushing you to stay on top. It's an attitude that determines success or failure in every business decision you face.
- Vince Lombardi had only one thought, and it carried him through every day. He wanted to win, and he wanted to do it now. To Vince, anything else but winning today was absolutely, totally repulsive and wholly unacceptable. He wanted to win right away.
- By emphasizing "winning today," you move everyone's thought process away from a general concept and direct it toward something substantial. It makes progress easy to measure. It makes everyone's performance easier to measure. It establishes a tempo for the organization, and it blows away any excuse about not understanding what our goal is and what you expect should be done to achieve it.
- Our strategy: We will become obsessed with "winning today." In everything I did from that point on, I would emphasize winning today. And that meant everyone in the organization had to have the same priority: "winning first", before anything else in their business relationships and decision making. Otherwise, we wouldn't have the focus we needed to produce a quick turnaround.



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- Winners become your message carriers. They sprinkle throughout your firm the knowledge it takes to shake off the doldrums, to make a bad situation better, to turn a good company into a great one. Winners walk with confidence, winners have habits that are molded from success, winners understand and teach what works.

### Communication

- You have to bring about the desired results by presenting a consistent message, which has to be repeated relentlessly and can never vary or be riddled with exceptions.
- To stay on top, you must communicate more openly within your organization than ever before. To become the best, you have to develop excellent internal communications. To maintain your elite status, it's essential to encourage even better discussions. As a manager, you need to do even more to nourish an open give-and-take, so everyone feels they're part of the ongoing process to improve the firm's effectiveness.
- If I have a meeting where I'm doing the bulk of the talking and only a few brave souls are participating, I won't allow the situation to go unchanged. I'll confront the silent ones and push them to speak up. If I can get enough people in that room to talk, everyone else eventually will join in. If they're still unwilling to become involved, I'll find others who are more willing to cooperate.

### Standards

- Once an employee no longer performs up to expectations – even if he has been around for 20 years – I have to correct the situation. If I lose confidence in his ability, I must make a change. Otherwise, I'm messing with my chances to succeed. I can't allow sentimentality to become a hurdle. It may sound cold and calculating. But if you want to win, that's the only way you can approach it.
- If someone has worked a year for you and hasn't improved noticeably, both you and your organization have let that person down.
- We expect so much of ourselves that we also expect others to care as deeply. Most times, that won't happen. I can't judge everyone by my standards and my drive; not everyone is governed by my internal drive. Still, there's a certain level of dedication that is fair to expect, and that is what we obtain.
- If I have to choose between warm and fuzzy and accomplishing my goals, there's no real option. The goals come first.
- It was essential that these standards apply to every layer, including top management. There wouldn't be a double standard in my organization. I find double standards abhorrent. They produce ill will and mistrust within the staff, and they generate resentment toward management and fellow employees. If you have standout employees, reward them with raises and promotions, not with special treatment, relaxed rules, and soft demands. Double standards inevitably lead to lousy morale within the company, and poor morale can only cut into production and waste energy.



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- I simply won't fail from lack of effort, lack of commitment, or lack of determination. Nor will my organization. I'm not going to fail, therefore I'll push aside any distractions and make sure that I take care of the assignments that have the highest priority. You must convey this single-mindedness of purpose to the entire organization. You have a duty, and you need to perform it as well as you can and as expeditiously as you can. Anything short of your best is not enough, nor will it ever be tolerated.
- Our employees now that things will never be the same. The free ride is over, the country-club atmosphere is gone, cronyism is out and now, performance alone will determine their future. The standards of the Bank have changed. If that bothers them, good. Things needed to be shaken up. Mediocrity no longer can be acceptable. They no longer can feel secure within the Malaise of Excuses.
- If you don't demand immediate results, you're creating an atmosphere where less than the best is acceptable, where winning is some abstract goal that serves more as a public relations ploy than an actual quest.
- Establish a consistent standard that allows everyone – inherited employees and new hires – to be judged the same way.
- Make it clear that we will no longer will tolerate the use of excuses as a rationalization for lack of production and progress.
- Mistakes were tolerated. No one demanded a high level of performance. Everyone was polite and nice. The staff did their jobs – and then they went home every night promptly at five-thirty. Oh, we lost? Well, too bad. We'll try to do better next week. I found that to be revolting. They didn't really have any long-range goals requiring excellence.
- The mind-set should be one of ambition, of striving to be better, of deserving to excel. The elements of failure can be everywhere – employees flaunting rules, reporting late for work, leaving early, spending too much time complaining and gossiping. We don't find errors acceptable. There has to be a purpose in what people do, and that purpose has to be understood and embraced by everyone in the organization.
- You should never accept failure either, not in any form. I won't let people or the culture or the atmosphere or history or lack of expectations bring me down. This is the essential attitude you must establish first before you can improve anything.
- I purposely turned things up-a-notch by being demanding. I demand answers by a certain time, demand things to be done a certain way. It's simply a matter of production – can you consistently produce, especially under pressure?
- Our message is consistent: we will be winners. It isn't hollow conversation; we talk with conviction and a tone that leaves no room for uncertainty. By adding winners to our business, we immediately are exposed to habits of success.
- You must have in place the specific standards and expectations by which performance can be judged. But this is particularly essential when you're either introducing change into the organization or trying to revitalize and change a company. If employees clearly understand how they should go



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about their duties and how their performance is being evaluated, they will adjust to the new atmosphere more easily.

- Devotion is all about buying in. It starts with a strong statement from management about what's expected from each employee. To me, it's elementary. You consistently produce, you stay. You don't produce, you leave. Any business that doesn't have a clear, precise operating tenet like this has not established the foundation for a winning, growth-oriented environment.
- Ultimately, it comes down to this. You have to be willing to make the sacrifices that enable you to reach the top of your profession. If you aren't willing to accept that and put in the time it takes, then you can't work for us because that's what we constantly demand. If you shirk your duties, I'll know it, and more importantly, you'll know it; you'll be replaced.
- Once you accept a job without protest, it tells me you're capable of fulfilling it and I expect it to be done right.
- Everyone should be expected to put in the extra time and take the extra steps to make things better for the company. To accept the minimum effort is unacceptable.
- All evaluations should be weighted heavily around one question: Has the employee's performance enhanced the ability of the company to succeed?
- You must avoid too many exceptions to the standards you have set, whether it involves personnel, policy, procedures, or any other aspect of your system. Once you start ignoring your base concepts, you risk undercutting the potential of your operation. You must have the discipline to stay with what's right, not with what's attractive or convenient at the moment.

### Interviewing Ideas

- Successful interviewing is designed to obtain certain answers that will either stimulate interest or serve as warning signs that this might not be the best person for the opening. I have put together a form containing mandatory questions. I keep the form in my desk, and I refer to it before the interview starts. I want to make sure I ask every candidate the same essential questions.
- The form evolved as I became more convinced it's crucial to do these interviews correctly and consistently every time. When I start off an interview, I usually attempt to find topics that the person will feel comfortable discussing, like family.
- What I'm trying to discover, more than anything else, is the candidate's ability to accept the parameters of the job, and his willingness to make the sacrifice it takes to do it right. Will the commitment I require be present?
- I don't ask inane questions, like what's your favorite flower or the last book you read. I want to know about their philosophies and approaches to various specific issues, and I want them to understand my feelings on those same issues. I ask job-specific stuff, not the idealistic probings of psychological tests.



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- When the interview is done, I have to be comfortable with you as a person and confident that I can entrust you with the responsibilities of your job. Never forget that this person, along with everyone else you hire, will help determine whether you succeed, so you can't afford a mistake even with one new employee, particularly with leadership positions. If you spend too much time in interviews analyzing the candidate's business qualifications and neglecting his personality and ideals, you risk botching the hiring process.
- Don't risk losing a promising employee by quibbling over an extra \$200-or \$2,000 for that matter. It's essential for you and those under you who also have hiring responsibilities to always see the bigger picture and put the welfare of the company ahead of minor hang-ups.
- Use the hiring of leaders to make a statement to your employees. Hire winners—those people with success in their background. Their tempo, work ethic, and enthusiasm will be essential in reinforcing the direction that you want our company to pursue.
- Hire leaders that complement your strengths, not those who duplicate them. You need to thoroughly identify your own role in the organization and clearly outline the proper delegation of authority and responsibility.

### Staffing

- You'll have a better chance of absorbing the turmoil if you come to terms with two key inevitabilities created by success: you won't be able to afford everyone, and you won't be able to accommodate everyone's employment goals.
- To offset the personnel losses that usually accompany success, you must increase your recruiting efforts, putting more time and manpower into this endeavor to make sure you're consistently feeding your organization with new blood to make up for the defections.
- Execute whatever financial steps you must to retain your key personnel, becoming proactive in this area instead of reacting when another company begins courting their services. To be proactive financially, you must develop an ability to anticipate the market regarding potential changes in salary and benefit demands.
- You can't allow your organization to become so dependent on any one individual that his loss will hamstring your ability to be the best.