

ATHLETICS OMNIBUS – THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THE JOB

From the Athletics Omnibus of Richard Stander, South Africa

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a remarkable resemblance between successful business and successful Sport. It is generally accepted that the ingredients of a successful Business would consist of a healthy balance between successful workers, good Business Management and good Business Leadership. These ingredients are also required to achieve success in sport. A healthy balance between talented athletes, good Federation Management and good Federation Leadership must be present to achieve success in a competitive environment such as sport.

When the 3 abovementioned relationships are not healthy, we will find that talented people becomes unproductive and eventually resign from sport. In most cases, talented people resign or retire because of bad management and not as a result of bad Sport Federations. This also applies to talented athletes that retire prematurely from the sport.

A Federation is as good as its best athletes. Successful Sport Federations understand what talents are needed:

- 1.1. For good leadership.
- 1.2. For good management.

This article shed some light on what type of talents are needed to a make a Sport Federation successful.

2. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE TERM “TALENT”

Dr Donald O. Clifton pioneered the systematic study of individual strengths and developed the concept of “Talent”. He defined talents as follows:

“Your talents are your recurring patterns of thought, feeling or behaviour”.

The process of manifesting “Talents” within a person takes place over many years and start from the inception of the child. The human mind continuously tries to make sense of activities taking place in and around the person.

Over many years, millions and millions of these activities are analysed by the human mind. These activities do not pass unnoticed. It continuously influences the thought, feeling and behavioural patterns of a person.

Because of the huge amount of information received on a daily basis, the human mind will automatically start to filter the activities happening around the person. The activities that are more prominent will be refined and focused on. In the case of less prominent activities the mind will sort them in the back of the mind and will eventually wither away.

Over time each person will develop in his or her mind a natural ability of favouring certain activities above other activities. Over time certain skills will become “second nature” and will be executed without noticing, while other skills will be difficult to master and will experienced by the human mind as not pleasant to execute.

This automatic selection process manifests itself in the mind. Once a situation arises, it will automatically be filtered by the mind and either focuses on the activity or rejects it. This ability to focus on a specific activity is called a “Talent”.

The establishment of the person’s unique talents takes place mostly during the growing stages of a child. By the time a person reaches adulthood, the person’s talent is part of his or her character and will automatically determine how he or she will react to a situation.

3. WHAT TYPES OF TALENTS ARE NEEDED FOR THE JOB

Leaders and Managers have different talents than specialists such as Athletes, Coaches and Technical Officials.

Specialists such as Bill Gates, Galileo Galilee, Albert Einstein, Michael Angelo, Ludwig Beethoven, etc. changed the world around them because their talents as specialists were applied correctly. Leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, Napoleon Bonaparte, Alexander the Great, etc. changed the world around them because their talents as Leaders/Managers were applied correctly.

It is important to identify the talent of each individual and utilize them according to their talents. A person with a talent to be a specialist will not be happy or effective as a Leader or Manager. Likewise, Leaders and Managers with a natural talent to be a specialist will not be happy or effective in their position as a Leader or Manager.

The table below differentiate between the talents of Leaders/Managers and Specialists.

Talents of a leader/Manager	Talents of a Specialists (coach, athlete, official)
Natural talent for leadership	Independent, self-sufficient
Fast, intuitive decision makers	Methodical decision makers
Like people and excels at communication	Like statistics and excels when analysing things
Ability to get many things done	Ability to get intricate things done
Likes organizing things	Likes doing things
Seeks to understand other views	Seeks the fact of the matter
Interested in business	Interested in science and technology
Dominant	Modest and humble
Extrovert and sociable	Introvert and prefer own company
Friendly and outgoing	Reserved and to the point
Gets energy from others	Gets energy from within
Impulsive	Intellectual
Vigorous, energetic	Meditative, philosophical

4. THE ROLE OF LEADERS AND MANAGERS IN UTILISING TALENT CORRECTLY

It is important that talented athletes must be developed to their full potential. To do this, the Federation required talented Leaders and Managers.

Both Leaders and Managers have similar specific talents that make them successful as Leaders or Managers. The main difference between how Leaders and Managers apply their talents, are that Leaders look outwards and Managers look inwards in the process of achieving their objectives.

- 4.1. Great leaders are visionaries, strategic thinkers and activators. They look outwards towards the opposition, finding a broad pattern, connections, cracks, etc., continuously seeking for the weak spots of the opposition and capitalize on it. In Sport Federations, this will be the Board, Presidents, Chief Executive Officers and Executive Directors.

The process of achieving the objective, e.g. presenting a successful event or a successful team, must be a smooth one. Great Leaders will ensure that there are no obstacles in the way of the Managers when the Managers execute strategies.

- 4.2. Great Managers will look inwards, individually at people's differences in style, goals, needs and what motivates them. They seek the right way of releasing each person's unique talent into performance. In a Sport Federation, Administrators, Officials and Coaches can all be categorised as Managers operating at various levels of responsibilities within the Federation.

For Managers to be effective in what they are doing, it must be understood that the use of brainpower is much more important than experience. Always keep in mind that the more things change around the Managers, the less the Managers can rely on experience. It is the Manager with the talent to take on a challenge that will be successful in an environment that is continuously changing.

Managers must use brainpower to continuously seek for more effective ways of releasing the talent of the "Staff" reporting to them. Relying on experience alone, in a highly competitive world, will most definitely lead to defeat. The opposition have record of your experience and their leaders will define a counteraction plan to eliminate your experience.

Good Managers will not wait for their leaders to give them guidance in developing the talent of their "Staff". Once the leaders defined the mission of the Federation, strategies must be identified to

unleash the talent of the Administrators, Officials and Coaches. Leaders and Managers should combine their brainpower in identifying strategies to unleash the talent of the Administrators, Officials and Coaches of the Federation.

- 4.3. Specialist has a natural talent to be “tunnel-minded”. They can focus on the objective to be achieved with a high level of concentration and will not be easily distracted by other activities happening around them. Unfortunately, because of their ability to focus on an objective, they often operate independently, are self-sufficient, reserved and to the point. These talents that make them great specialist can easily be misinterpreted by Leaders and Managers as a lack of cooperation on the part of the specialist.

Once the objectives are defined and the strategies are worked out to achieve the objectives, leaders should refrain from interfering with the process of implementing strategies. Leaders who get involved in operational matters, lengthen the chain of command, and slow the process of implementation down. The lengthening of the chain of command gives the opposition more room to counteract your actions. Always remember, “While you are sleeping on a matter before you decide, you have a competitor who doesn’t need the sleep”.

Likewise, Manager’s that interfere in the operational matters of specialists will most definitely retard the development of the talented athlete.

In short, the role of the Leader is to make sure that everybody has a clear vision of what the objectives are. The role of the Managers is to measure the progress made in achieving the objective. The role of the specialist is to achieve the objective.

5. UTILIZING TALENTS TO ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE

One of the most commonly used slogans in the World of Sport is that “Excellence consists of 10% talent and 90% hard work”.

Each person has his or her unique talents, and in a particular environment, will be either a winner or a struggler. In the outcome of any project, the implementer of the project will never be a loser. There are only winners or strugglers.

In achieving excellence, finding and utilising the right talent for the job is much more important than experience, brainpower or will power. Giving the right talent the right objective to achieve is as important.

The slogan “Excellence consists of 10% talent and 90% hard work” elevates “averages” to the level of excellence. When setting objectives, one should never use “averages” to estimate the limits of excellence. You will drastically underestimate what is possible for a talented Administrator, Coach, Official or Athlete. Average thinking actively reduces performance because objectives will be set according to the average level of thinking.

The slogan “Excellence consists of 10% talent and 90% hard work” suggests that even a struggler can achieve excellence. Trying to improve the struggler in the world of sport seems practical, but is fatal in achieving excellence. A struggler can at its very best be improved to be a survivor.

Spending time on a struggler leaves you with not enough time for the difficult task of achieving excellence with your talented Administrator, Coach, Official or Athlete. Remember, you and your opposition have the same time frames to adhere to in achieving excellence. It is the Federation (Leaders, Managers and talented athletes) that uses time best that will achieve excellence.

Talented people will achieve excellence much easier because the recurring patterns of behaviour for the specific form of excellence come naturally to them.

Talented people can easily be motivated to work harder, because they enjoy what they are doing and as a result, success is achieved much faster when compared to that of the struggler. More importantly, they will enjoy the hard work because the recurring patterns come natural to them. The slogan “Success breeds success” is very relevant here.

It must be kept in mind that achieving excellence will still require a lot of hard work for the talented person. The only difference is that the talented person will enjoy hard work, while the struggler will hate it all the way.

6. IS EXCELLENCE AND FAILURE TWO OPPOSITES

One of the most common mistakes made by Leaders, Managers and Athletes are to study the failure of others and then tries to invert it into excellence.

Another common mistake which is made by Leaders, Managers and Athletes while striving for excellence, is to try and eliminate the wrong ways. That in fact, will only lead to the exposure of other wrong ways.

The truth is that failure and excellence is often surprisingly similar. It is just different, not the opposite. It has its own configuration. It is in fact the average performance that is the anomaly.

All situations have the same ingredients e.g. all 8 athletes in the 100m Olympic Games final are subjected to the same rules, environment, etc. All athletes in the 100m Olympic Games final experience the same tension, anxiety and fear. It is the athlete with the best situational talents that will determine the difference between success and failure.

What distinguishes the Leaders, Managers and Athletes who achieved excellence from those who failed, is their talent to willingly to confront a situation and to fight the fear; the urge to always do better no matter what.

Leaders, Managers and Athletes should be exposed to the best possible technicians in sport to ensure that situational talents are channelled into the right direction. In other words, if you want to run 100m at maximum speed, the body and mind must be conditioned to run at maximum speed by the best technicians. Training at a slow pace will not make you a faster athlete.

The same principle applies for administrators, Technical Official, etc. If talented staff members are to be taught to be productive, the staff member must work hand in hand with a staff member with a proven record of productivity.

The talent of Leaders, Managers and Athletes must continuously be challenged to ensure higher levels of excellence. The Leaders, Managers and Athletes who have the talent to confront a situation will thrive in an environment where competitiveness is the norm.

7. DO WE FOCUS ON THE STRENGTHS OR WEAKNESS IN THE STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE

Everybody have a weakness and you can be sure that your opposition will try to identify your weakness and capitalize on it. The common defence is to identify the weakest areas and strengthen them because we were brought under the impression that "A chain is as strong as its weakest link".

The slogan "A chain is as strong as its weakest link" in fact creates the wrong impression of how to raise productivity or to achieve excellence in the world of sport.

The fact is, when you are in trouble, your best talent will be the one that will get you out of trouble and not you're weakest. It is therefore important to note that to achieve excellence; you should focus on utilising your strongest talents and manage around your weaknesses.

Your opposition may have plans to capitalize on your weaknesses because they know that their strengths are better than your weakness. This does not mean that you should try to strengthen your weaknesses.

If you focus on utilising your strengths to its full potential, it is more than likely that your opposition will not be able to match it. The talented Leaders, Managers and Athletes are your most valuable assets and it only make sense to spent the most time with them.

It is also true that your most talented Leaders, Managers and Athletes have the biggest potential to use their talents destructively. It is therefore very important to spend more time with your talented Leaders, Managers and Athletes to ensure that they use their talents to your advantage rather than against you.

Talented Leaders, Managers and Athletes have a natural tendency to focus on achieving a set objective. It is therefore important not to guide them or to play the role of a mentor. Their talents do not need guidance. It needs focussing. Rather encourage them to focus more on what they do well, and less on what they do badly.

When focusing the Leaders, Managers and Athletes on their talents, define the objective that must be achieved well. Be vivid and quantitatively when painting the picture and keep on pushing them towards that objective.

When talented Leaders, Managers or Athlete has a weakness, devise a support system for the weakness e.g. if the person have a tendency to leave things behind ask the person to use a checklist before leaving for another destination. Don't try to fix the weakness by reprimanding the person for forgetting things. It is not productive.

If a checklist doesn't help manage around the weakness, find another person to check on his or her behalf if everything is in place before departure, or find another method, but do not lose the person. Talented Leaders, Managers and Athletes are hard to come by.

In events where teamwork is required, it is important that every member of that team must be focused to do what he or she does best.

The slogan "There is no "I" in the word team" is often used as motivation that there should be collaboration and mutual support in a group.

The slogan "There is no "I" in the word team" wants you to understand that there is camaraderie amongst the group and everyone's contribution to the group is equal.

On the contrary, a productive team should be seen as one where each one in the group knows what he knows best, and spent most of the time in doing what he or she do best. In other words, excellent teams build around individual excellence.

The concept of effective teamwork can be seen when the top performer in a team is slowed down due to the lack of productivity of a struggler in the team. The top performer will assist the struggler in the team purely because the top performer wants to get the job done as fast and as effective as possible.

As soon as the problem is solved, the top performer will again focus on his or her own responsibilities without dwelling around the struggler.

8. DO WE COPY SOMEONE'S EXCELLENCE RECIPE TO THE LETTER IN OUR QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE

Following the example of the top performer would be a logical conclusion to make. This mistake is also a common mistake in the world of sport where the Manager wants his or her workers to do things in exactly the same way as the Manager is doing it.

No two people can do things in exactly the same way. Insisting to do things the same way, without any adjustments, will without doubt lead to failure. It will most definitely lead to a lack of initiative, lack of creativity, and a lack of productivity.

It is therefore very important to define the right outcomes (objectives) and then find your own route towards achieving those outcomes. Once the route to achieve the desired outcomes is defined, stick to it religiously, but be prepared to adjust when necessary.

In science we learn that the shortest distance between two destinations is a straight line. Unfortunately in business and in sport this is not true. The shortest route between two destinations is always the one with the least resistance.

Always remember: "Achieving the desired outcome, is more important than the route that was plotted to achieve the outcome". After all, winning the gold medal at the Olympic Games is much more important than any form of conditioning that was done prior to winning the medal.

If the route in some cases proofed to be difficult to achieve and there is an easier way to progress to the next level of excellence, take the route with less resistance. This off course excludes the use of illegal means and methods.

Plotting the route to excellence for the Administrator, Coach, Official and Athlete will create the right type of tension. The talent of the Leader, Manager and Athlete to confront any situation will ensure that they will follow the route until excellence is achieved.

Plotting the route and setting objectives also enable all interested parties to compare the progress made on the plotted route. It can be determined if the progress is ahead of standard and if not, contingency plans can be put in place.

9. PLOTTING THE CORRECT PATH TO ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE

It is a common belief that the “talent” to achieve excellence can be taught. Skills can be developed, knowledge can be obtained, but talent cannot be taught. You either have it or you don’t.

It is therefore of utmost importance that talent must be selected correctly right from the inception stages. The will for a Leader, Manager and Athlete to confront and to win is a talent that must be present when objectives are set in sport.

Creativity is an important ingredient in the inception stages of any project. In the early stages of a project very little comparative information is available and the Leader, Manager and Athlete will have to rely on their talent to confront. The talent to confront will encourage them to experiment with various methods while identifying the plotted route towards the set objective.

Once the objective is clear and the route to achieve excellence is identified the applying of standards becomes very important. Standards allow the Leader, Manager and Athlete to move fast forward because the road ahead is clearly laid out with standards such as Technical Rules, Fixtures lists, Performance Lists, etc.

No experimenting must take place once the quest to excellence has started. Experimenting during this phase will lead to confusion and failure.

Standards are designed to ensure that all interested parties speak the same language. Standards such as Technical Rules, Fixtures lists, Performance Lists, etc. enable all interested parties (Athletes, Coaches Administrators and Technical Officials) to create an environment where excellence can be achieved.

Standards ensure that people speak the same language and collaborate with each other. Standards create favourable conditions to achieve success. The sooner the standards such as Technical Rules, Fixtures lists, Performance Lists, etc are available, the sooner preparation can start and the better the chance of excellence.

Because standards indicate the perimeters within which one can move, it allows for much more room for movement and change. Because you know where the perimeters are, you can move forward much faster. This results in having more time to spare between the stages of progression.

Standards also give more time to adapt to new challenges. With more time available between phases, the Leader, Manager and Athlete have more time to be creative. In the modern world of sport, this definitely gives you the competitive edge.

10. SELF EVALUATION

- 10.1. The Leader or Manager that wants to remain competitive should have a continuous programme in place that develops the following skills:
 - 10.1.1. Thinking strategically
 - 10.1.2. Establishing priorities
 - 10.1.3. Giving and receiving feedback
 - 10.1.4. Developing communication skills
 - 10.1.5. Conducting effective personal interviews
 - 10.1.6. Conflict resolution
 - 10.1.7. Understanding of company strategies, policies and procedures
 - 10.1.8. The use of computers and other relevant electronic equipment for effective and speedy networking.

11. CONCLUSION

Successful Leaders / Managers:

- 1.1. Have objectives that they would like to achieve
- 1.2. Control their own destiny
- 1.3. Are informed and are always close to the action

- 1.4. Keep the subordinates well informed
- 1.5. Delegate to subordinates
- 1.6. Provide subordinates with power and authority
- 1.7. Develop their subordinates
- 1.8. Provide subordinates with clear objectives to achieve
- 1.9. Apply accountable procedures and processes
- 1.10. Face reality as it is and not as it was or wish it to be
- 1.11. Change before they have to change
- 1.12. Are candid with subordinates
- 1.13. Do not compete if they do not have to

Working with talented people is a both a privilege and a huge responsibility. The risk is always there that you can put yourself in the forefront and in the process become an obstacle in achieving excellence.

It is important to remember that the process is never more important than the product. In the quest to achieve excellence the danger is always there that standards, rules and regulations can be followed to such and extend, that it obscures the desired outcomes.

Following rules and the examples of role models to the letter without using your discretion always leads to a lack of productivity, and in the world of sport, this means not winning the gold medal.

The difference between being a winner or a struggler is determined by how you utilise your talent. A winner can become a struggler when external forces such as rules, regulations, personal ego's and bad Leadership/Management decisions become obstacles for the talented Leader, Manager and Athlete.

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HOW SUCCESSFUL ARE YOU AS A LEADER AT THE MOMENT

SCALE:

Only one answer per question. The value of each point = 1

	Seldom 1	Sometime 1	Normally 1
1. Is your company devoted to help people grow and develop			
2. Is your company willing to spend money to develop you staff			
3. Is your company willing to make changes to allow your staff to grow			
4. Does your company support leaders that is willing to take difficult decisions, necessary to allow the company to grow			
5. Does the company emphasise productivity rather than positions or titles			
6. Are their opportunity for growth within the Company			
7. Does the company leaders possesses vision and do they share it with the staff			
8. Does the company think big			
9. Does the company promote people internally			
10. Are their other leaders in the company willing to make personal sacrifices to ensure that others grow			
Sub totals			
Final Total:			

ANSWER:

Deduct the points marked in the "Seldom" column from 10

KEY:

9-10: You are successful as a leader

6-8: You have limited success as a leader but have potential to develop.

5 or less: You have serious weaknesses in your leadership skills

HOW GOOD IS YOU'RE DELEGATING SKILLS?

	True	False
2. Always delegate specific tasks to a subordinate with the specific experience.		
3. The subordinate to whom you delegate must receive as much information possible.		
4. Control mechanisms must form part of a delegated task right from the beginning.		
5. When a task is delegated, monitoring the process is as important as the desired outcome.		
6. Critical decisions in a delegated task remain the responsibility of the leader.		
7. Always present routine work to the subordinate as a challenge		
8. Delegation is the same as to give instructions		
9. Do not offer advice when delegating		
10. Apply the same procedures and systems to evaluate the accountability of subordinates to avoid favouritism.		
11. If a subordinate fails a task, do not delegate to the subordinate again		

ANSWERS

Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.4	Q.5	Q.6	Q.7	Q.8	Q.9	Q.10
False	True	True	False						

KEY: How Good Is You're Delegating Skills To Your Subordinates?

9-10: You are good delegater

6-8: You know the basics; Keep on learning

5 or less: You have serious weaknesses in your leadership skills

DO YOU HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME A LEADER

Scale: 0 = Never; 1 = Seldom; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Normally; 4 = Always	0	1	2	3	4
1. Do you have influence					
2. Do you have self discipline					
3. Have you proved yourself yet					
4. Do you maintain good human relations					
5. Do you have the capacity to solve problems					
6. You do not accept the status quo					
7. Do you see the whole picture					
8. Can you handle stress					
9. Do you have a positive attitude					
10. The people understand you					
11. You have not personal problems					
12. You are willing to accept responsibility					
13. You do not have cropped up fury					
14. You are willing to make changes					
15. You have integrity					
16. You have strong spiritual believes					
17. You have the capacity to anticipate what to do next					
18. You are accepted as a leader					
19. You have a desire to keep on learning					
20. Your attitude attracts people					
21. You have a good self image					
22. You are willing to serve others					
23. You do not allow problems to get the better of you					
24. You have the capacity to develop other leaders					
25. You take the initiate					
Sub totals					
Final Total:					

ANSWER: Add up all the points and evaluate your score using the key below.

KEY: Are You A Leader

18-20: Great leader. You should be a mentor to other leaders

16-17: Great leader

14-15: Upcoming leader

12-13: You have potential to become a leader. Your leadership skills should be developed

Less than 12: You are not ready to be a leader yet

ARE YOU A SPECIALIST

SCALE: Poor = 2 Acceptable = 4 Good average = 6 Above average = 8 Outstanding = 10	Poor	Acceptable	Good Average	Above Average	Outstanding
<u>QUALITY OF WORK</u> Accuracy and thoroughness according to accepted criteria and standards					
<u>QUANTITY OF WORK</u> Volume and consistency of productive performance in relation to normal expectations.					
<u>JOB KNOWLEDGE</u> Understanding of procedures, instructions and techniques					
<u>ADAPTABILITY</u> To grasp instructions, learn new procedures and operations.					
<u>PROBLEM SOLVING</u> Ability to recognise problems, analyse them and take the opportunity of solving them.					
<u>PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT</u> Enthusiasm and pride in their performance.					
<u>DEPENDABILITY</u> Carry out duties conscientiously with a minimum of supervision.					
<u>CO-OPERATION</u> Willingness to work towards effective completion of tasks.					
<u>CREATIVITY</u> Ability to come up with constructive ideas to improve a procedure or operation.					
<u>ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY</u> Meticulously prompt in appointments and in regular attendance?					
Sub totals					
Final Total:					

ANSWER: Add up all the points and evaluate your score using the key below

KEY: Are you a good example to your subordinates

90-100: Great Specialist. You should be a mentor to other Specialist

80-89: Great Specialist

70-79: Upcoming Specialist

60-69: You have potential to become a Specialist. Your Specialist talents should be developed

Less than 60: If you want to be a specialist, focus on another area of interest.