

Whitewater Rafting

Note: A fellow coach, Dave Cameron in NSW, shared this with me years back and I recently came across it and reckon in 2020 the principle and the story is still as apt as it was in 2007. _ LT

In 2007 after limping out of their fourth straight World Cup as beaten favourites, New Zealand Rugby drove change. Leading coaches, business leaders, anybody they could find with a history of success was invited to address the team.

And one day a man came in and spoke about the three states of being, as he saw them.

The first, he described, was Space Mountain. That is the Disneyland ride where you get on a roller coaster that operates in the dark and hang on for dear life.

Once aboard, as anybody who has ridden it knows, you have no idea where you are going and no control over what happens next.

As an athlete, he said, that was the worst state to be in.

The second was whitewater rafting.

In this state, athletes were on the raft and obstacles were coming up, but they had a life vest and a paddle and together they could work to overcome those obstacles and navigate their way through.

The third he called America's Cup.

This was state of the art. The best equipment, wanting for nothing, no expense spared in the pursuit for success.

The state the All Blacks were in, he said, was America's Cup, which made everyone feel pretty chuffed.

Everything was laid out for them. While on tour, for example, they would rise in the morning and breakfast before boarding the bus to their next destination.

Meanwhile, background staff would pack their clothes to load on a separate bus so by the time they arrived in their next city it was already unpacked in their new hotel rooms.

Then he dropped a small grenade.

Where the All Blacks needed to be, where he said all elite sports teams need to be, was whitewater rafting.

Given you can't control your opposition and what problems they might present, teams needed to find ways to overcome adversity to be successful.

Now after two World Cups, a record 18-Test winning streak and a winning percentage somewhere in the vicinity of heaven, the All Blacks have clearly figured it out.

Overcoming adversity is the heart of every great sport story.

Nobody cares for Rocky if he flukes a lucky first-round knockout. He has to take his beating first.

And so to Bowls. Most clubs are at Space Mountain on the Disneyland ride, hanging on for dear life. No plan of any description, just a vague hope that things will turn out okay. For those clubs fortunate enough to have a Bowls Coordinator and / or Coach with any nous, there is a plan and some continuity in selection. Generally, however, most selectors are appointed annually at the Club AGM and generally the “mates rules” apply – *you get elected if you look after your mates*. At a Zone, Region or District level, it appears if, the same applies and there appears to be very little analysis of why teams fail to win...it’s often a case of “well they (the opposition) were just too good on the day, but we’ll bounce back.”

Planning ahead

1. **Do a SWOT analysis** – be factual, be honest,
 - a. **Strengths** – players, facilities, coaching and culture,
 - b. **Weaknesses** – players, facilities, aging demographic, over-inflated ego’s, culture, lack of appropriate coaching,
 - c. **Opportunities** – Recruitment – new and players from other clubs – *it’s amazing how often clubs with good players and a positive culture are able to attract other good players*. Purposeful Practice – organize a coach to conduct skills drills for all interested players – plan a program that will run during the off-season to prepare players for pennants.
 - d. **Threats** – player / member dissatisfaction - The La Trobe Uni Report [2013] into bowls found that the three major reasons people leave bowls are:
 1. **Selection process** – neither open nor transparent *Yes, the selection committees and selection cause more problems than anything else, and I think the main reason for that is as people get older they don’t mind going up, but they don’t like coming down ... some don’t have any problem, but most don’t realise that they’re not quite as good as they used to be...and a lot of them have a lot of trouble of making way...making room for the younger members.*

2. **Treatment of people by other club members** – “the Table of Knowledge is not inclusive” nor are many skips... *We had one day in a game last year where the skipper mouthed off to our teammates about the three of us. You know the skipper stays at the other end and he said those three blokes are effing hopeless, they’ve done nothing. I’ve been carrying them all day and when that comes back to you via the other blokes halfway through a game. ... You go out in every game to try to win, to be the best, but when you hear that you’d rather go up and have another beer and just mouth off at your skipper when he walks past you, which is the wrong attitude.*

3. **The Quality of Club Administration** - One of the common sources of frustration identified by some interviewees as the reason why they themselves had stopped bowling or they had seen others stop, was a perception that a club is poorly managed and diminished the element of fun associated with bowls.... *It’s probably sour grapes, but I thought the management and I thought some of the people at the club were just idiots.... I think some aspects of it’s poorly run and I think that ... well bowling stopped being fun.*

What is Club Culture

Culture is the expression of a team’s values, attitudes and beliefs about sports and competition. It determines whether, for example, the team’s focus is on fun, mastery or winning, or whether it promotes individual accomplishment or team success. The culture is grounded in an identified sense of mission and shared goals, for instance, the goal of qualifying for a regional championships or winning a state title.

A team that is in constant conflict or has a negative atmosphere will bring team members, players and coaches alike, down and this unpleasant atmosphere will also hurt individual players performances. Conversely, a team culture built on positive energy, support and fun will lift everyone up, feel comfortable and supportive, and the results will show it.

The culture creates norms of acceptable behaviour on a team, either explicitly or implicitly conveying to members what is allowed and what is not. These norms can dictate to team members how to behave, communicate, cooperate, and deal with conflict. When clear norms are established, everyone on a team is more likely to abide by them.

Questions to be asked –

1. What values do we want to act as the foundation for our team culture?

2. What attitudes and beliefs about our sport, competition, and team do we want to hold?
3. What are the goals that our team wants to pursue?

4. How do the players and coaches want to treat each other?
5. What kind of atmosphere do we want on our team?

When you ask and answer these questions, you are proactively developing a team culture of your team's own design rather than leaving it to chance. In doing so, you are building a team that has its best chance of being positive and supportive and, as a result, performing at its highest level possible.

Again may I give due acknowledgement to Dave Cameron for sharing the article.

Lachlan Tighe, 2020.