

LIFELONG SPORTS LEADERSHIP

THE ROLE OF TEAM SPORTS AT WORK

By **NEDIM KARAEVLI**
editor@leaderonomics.com

GROWING up in a family of athletes and coaches, playing basketball, football and volleyball was a major part of my life.

The great thing about sports is that young people can enjoy themselves, while learning skills like perseverance, motivation, sportsmanship, discipline and teamwork that can help them in life. I have had great teachers and mentors, who helped shape the way I interact with others on the court, in the field and also in the office.

Team sports like basketball teach us important life skills which can translate into business life. In whatever career we choose, we need to understand people, establish friendships, motivate others and work together. Everybody has a role to play in his or her job. There might be a basketball play or strategy – like a business plan – which every team member must execute on.

A recent article in the *Journal of Leadership and Organisational Studies* examined how participation in competitive youth sports is related to early-career job prospects as well as late-in-life outcomes. The study findings:

- People expect former student-athletes to display significantly more leadership, self-confidence, and self-respect than those who were active outside of sports
- Men who participated in high school sports an average of 60 years prior appeared to demonstrate higher levels of leadership and held more senior positions. They also volunteered and donated to charity more frequently.



But what if it has been years since you last dribbled a basketball, put on your football cleats, or run and swam in a team?

TEAM WORK: BREAKING BOUNDARIES

Through sports activities at work, we don't just get a chance to meet people from different functions or departments we usually don't work with, we also become united with a common goal to perform well as a team.

The perseverance, being a good team player and positive attitude of accepting defeat that one learns from sports activities can be transferred to daily work.

Staying connected with your team also helps build your support system. Yes it is possible to build lasting friendships at work!

PRODUCTIVITY: PHYSICAL AND MENTAL AGILITY!

There are obvious health benefits of regular sports activity – improving fitness, as well as building endurance, developing concentration and increasing self-discipline.

Swedish researchers found that a sports programme at work increases productivity (*Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine*, 2011), and results from another study suggest that sport may play an important role in stress management intervention programmes at work.



WALKING MEETINGS AND THE IMPACT ON CREATIVITY

Remember how we used to crave having classes or lectures outside rather than being confined to classrooms? Managers can step up their game by stepping out for meetings! Having walking meetings are becoming increasingly popular with Mark Zuckerberg and Barack Obama reportedly being big fans of it. One study found that "Walking opens up the free flow of ideas, and it is a simple and robust solution to the goals of increasing creativity and increasing physical activity" (*Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*).

So walk and talk while you walk the talk!

MAKING IT HAPPEN!

Managers and organisations can play a role in creating a healthy work environment.

1. Start sports teams which can take part in workplace challenges internally and against other companies. Basketball for example, can be played by people of all ages and abilities – so no one needs to feel left out.

2. Come one, come all! Younger employees can demonstrate their leadership by taking the initiative to organise activities – further developing their own leadership skills, as well as confidence and self-esteem.

3. Way of life: More than just a periodic event, employees can be encouraged to cycle to work rather than drive. Companies can provide secure bike racks and shower facilities, as well as space for exercise classes.

■ *Nedim strongly believes that sports is a critical component in leadership development. He is often seen enthusiastically sharing his passion for sports as well as the basketball skills he has amassed having actively played since age 7! To connect with Nedim, email editor@leaderonomics.com For more leadership content, do go to www.leaderonomics.com*

IS NEGATIVE THINKING BAD FOR YOUR BRAIN?

BRAIN BULLETIN



■ *Terry Small is a brain expert who resides in Canada and believes that anyone can learn how to learn easier, better, faster, and that learning to learn is the most important skill a person can acquire. For more interesting articles on Brain Bulletin, log on to www.leaderonomics.com*

By **TERRY SMALL**
editor@leaderonomics.com

WHEN was the last time you thought about your thinking? How much of your thinking is positive? Negative?

"Well-known neurologist" Willie Nelson said, "Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you'll start having positive results."

It turns out that this is true where your brain health is concerned.

IS NEGATIVE THINKING BAD FOR YOUR BRAIN?

Scientists seem to think that it is. Researchers at King's College London found that repetitive negative thinking may increase your risk for Alzheimer's disease (*Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*). Remember, at this time there is no cure for Alzheimer's, so this deserves your attention.

The study found that a habit of prolonged negative thinking diminishes your brain's ability to think, reason, and form memories, essentially draining your brain's resources.

Another study reported in the *Journal of American Academy of Neurology* found that cynical thinking also produces a greater dementia risk.

Remember, brains get good at what they do. Negative thoughts create "channels" in your brain. This way of thinking can become your default.

If you do a lot of negative thinking, your brain wires to be good at producing negative thoughts. Your brain also gets good at seeing things to think negatively about.

One of the byproducts of negative thinking is stress, which then leads to more negative thinking.

A 'SURE FIRE' STRESS BUSTER

Here's a suggestion:

When negative thoughts come, and they will,

don't just ignore them. Pay attention. Stop what you are doing. Close your eyes if you need to. Replace the negative thought with a positive thought. Hold the positive thought in your brain for a full minute, or more.

When you do this, neuroplasticity starts to work in your favour. The two keys are attention density, and holding the thought long enough for your brain to begin to create new "channels". Scientists refer to this as quantum Zeno effect.

YOU BECOME A SCULPTOR OF YOUR OWN BRAIN. HOW COOL IS THAT?

A good book to read on self-directed neuroplasticity is *You are Not Your Brain* by Jeffrey Schwartz. When you change your habits of mind, your life changes.

Tom Hopkins once said, "Being miserable is a habit; being happy is a habit; and the choice is yours". There is some truth to this.

One more suggestion:

Go for a whole week without complaining. Not even once. Log it. If you relapse, start your week over. Back to day one. Go for a week without complaining.....and watch the people around you change. Such is the power of mirror neurons.