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In the 2014 World Cup, it was devastating to see Brazil, a country strongly branded as a “football nation,” get butchered by Germany with a heart-wrenching goal tally of seven to one. If there’s anything obvious about this loss, coaches and managers can easily pinpoint one thing: the absence of leadership.

In football, the team captain or the star player sets up the team’s defence, organises the calculation of the goalkeeper’s next shot, or delivers the shots himself (and scores). We’ve seen this act celebrat-ed many times with Neymar Jr of Brazil, Lionel Messi of Argentina and Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal.

Indeed, whether it’s in the corporate or sporting world, someone calls the final shot. Someone leads the pack, makes critical decisions, and has the final say. He is the team captain, the commander, the chief executive officer (CEO), and the president.

THE GOAL RUSH

Have you ever experienced that feeling when one type of success begets another success? When money begets more money? When a score magically rushes up and lost any hope of catching up. Germany, Brazil’s fans had totally given up and lost any hope of catching up. They lost the World Cup hosted in their own country.

Brazil’s loss teaches us that relying too much on star players to make a team win is not sustainable, and is never enough to win the coveted cup. The team captain or the star player may be the best performer in the team, but he alone cannot carry an own country.

Similarly, no company will succeed if it is being run like a one-man show. As a company grows and becomes more complex, power naturally disintegrates and gets divided to more and more leaders. Resisting this by continuing to monopolise decision-making will only lead to a power vacuum. Henceforth, I’ll say it cold and straight: I hate companies that feature a one-man show.

These are organisations that perform extremely well only because the leader dominates the power to strategise and execute everything. These are companies where managers are afraid to vocalise their own concerns, or suggest their own brilliant ideas out of fear that the CEO will shut them down, or because the CEO “will have the last say anyway.” These are companies that feature a small group of star players that drive 80% of the companies’ sales but instantly crumble to bankruptcy the moment their star players leave.

One-man show companies don’t know what to do next the moment their leader steps down (or in some cases, dies).

SUSTAINING SUCCESS THROUGH EMPOWERMENT AND TEAMWORK

Effective leadership, in its purest sense, means clearing the path and not dictating the path for your people. It entails empowerment and delegation of power to managers who are capable of calling the shots, especially when the leader is out.

And why would the leader be out? Because he’s probably out there in the vast ocean looking for new sources of growth while his team digs into current sources of growth.

Effective leadership means trusting your team to deliver the same quality of craftsmanship you would uphold for yourself.

BRAZIL VS GERMANY

GAME OBSERVATION

Neymar is a good player. Imagine what he can do in the next World Cup as he’s only 21! But he cannot win for Brazil alone. He needs teammates who are as reliable and strong as he is. The same can be said for Thiago Silva who probably had less sleep that day as he took accounta-

bility for Brazil’s loss. Personally, I think that other team members should have also stepped up in these times of “national distress.” In contrast, Germany slayed teams in the last World Cup because its players were generally reliable. Every German player possesses the mentality of stepping up and owning the responsibility to organise defence, demand the ball, and drive a score – with or without the star players’ initiatives. Everyone is empowered and encouraged to lead in his own right.

Brazil had Neymar but Germany had a team.

POLISHING YOUR NEXT DIAMOND TALENT

Successful leaders don’t just continue leading to achieve more success. They also think about succession planning. They are always on the prowl, and are always on the hunt to look for those diamond-in-the-rough talents who can continue their legacy the moment they step down. They feel secure of their positions, and are willing to transfer their knowledge and skills to a new breed of leaders.

They are unselfish. They always “wear a corporate hat” and think of the organisation’s interests even after their exit, even if they have nothing to do with the company anymore (because that’s just what good leaders do).

Unfortunately, successful leaders get blinded and complacent such that the agenda of searching for the “next big talent” gets shelved. We’ve seen this happen painfully too many times. We’ve seen countries collapse when their uncorrupted leader gets replaced by a rotten one. We’ve seen companies crash the moment their CEOs die and get replaced by an irrelevant one.

PARING THOUGHTS

Brazil’s loss in the 2014 World Cup will be one for the books and will never be forgotten. If there’s any valuable lesson I will tell my grandchildren about this sport, it would be about leadership. I will tell them that in leadership (be it football or in class or at work), there is no such thing as carrying your team all by yourself to greatness.

After all, there is no “I” in “team.”

DO YOU RELY TOO MUCH ON YOUR STAR PLAYERS?

ONE-MAN SHOW COMPANIES DON’T KNOW WHAT TO DO NEXT THE MOMENT THEIR LEADER STEPS DOWN OR Passes AWAY.