

The Power of Synergy...and Face to Face with Legendary Coach 'Bear' Bryant

Charming, affable and easy-going, Coach "Bear" Bryant couldn't have been nicer when I interviewed him as a young journalist. I did my homework, researching why this man with the houndstooth fedora and strange nickname (which he acquired because he offered to wrestle a bear at age 13) was such a legend. What I learned with the research, was that Bryant knew the power of synergy and used it to create unbeatable teams wherever he went. Of course, he was best known for his 25 years at the University of Alabama where, as head coach, he amassed six national championships (tied for the most in modern college football history) and thirteen conference championships.

However it's the synergy he created that is worth talking about, especially during a time in our lives when we are all looking for an edge, a new idea or smarter technique to enable us to handle the challenges created by COVID and move forward, even if it's in a direction we've never ventured before.

"It's not the will to win that matters-everyone has that. It's the will to prepare to win that matters," said Bryant. And his preparedness turned a dissimilar group of college boys into a trusting unit that produced amazing results over and over again.

Bryant's secret formula...he inspired others to collaborate for one common cause, getting egos out of the way and focusing on the win. He instilled in every player the physical and mental prowess needed to succeed. His record proves his strategies and philosophies worked. He created trust, respect and self-value, three ingredients that helped form the glue that made his teams so powerful.

Modeling Bryant, let's look at five strategies to create synergy in every organization.

- **Share what you know-** Years ago, a business model came out called the Johari Window, which sounds more sophisticated than it actually was. Basically there were four quadrants. One quadrant represented what you knew, one quadrant represented what everyone knew, one quadrant what no one knew and one represented what you knew but others didn't. The goal—focus on the quadrant that everyone knew, which happens by sharing what we know as well as our time, energy and compassion. A fun Chinese proverb says:

If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap.

If you want happiness for a day, go fishing.

If you want happiness for a month, get married.

If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune.

If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody else.

- **Understand the importance of a positive environment-** There's transformative strength in surrounding yourself with smart people who are also navigating a new world and learning how to position themselves for success, and the environment has to be positive. Note: Please check out (listed below) my brand-new Peer Power coaching designed to build on the power of synergy and exponentially increase creative business solutions*. Synergy is not a destination, but an ongoing process. Bryant was tough and told it like it was, but the environment he created was one of positivity. He always believed his boys were capable of the possibilities and that instilled the self-value everyone needed.
- **Develop trust by keeping people safe-** This creates an environment where everyone is respected, and allows people to speak their minds without repercussions. I had a client in the World Trade Center in Manhattan. When I met with the two owners to

discuss the program I would be teaching, they sadly informed me their management team was full of liars. I felt they expected me to sympathize, but I replied that people were basically truthful, unless they got punished for being honest. If people get yelled at or humiliated when a mistake is made, they will do whatever it takes to keep the next mistake hidden. And when you have an environment of trust, it fosters creativity and growth, cognitive and emotional flexibility, and social connectedness.

- **Create leadership and followership-**To create dynamic synergy in a football team or company, we need leaders and followers, and both must co-exist. In order to create the kind of energy that allows people to be followers, it is essential that everyone realizes the worth of his/her position. Obviously, there's only one quarterback playing at a time, and only one CEO or president. But without the rest of the team nothing is going to get done. Do we remember to acknowledge everyone for what they're doing right, listen to their perspectives and see the value in every single job, every single position? Understanding one's contributions and the value in how they fit into a bigger picture is an incredible motivator.
- **Revitalize with Purpose and a Vision-**Think about what drives you to excellence. Ever decide to learn a new skill, lose weight, apply for a position at a company you weren't sure about? If you had a strong enough drive/purpose/desire, then you could see yourself getting what you needed and make it happen. Research indicates dedication to a worthy cause has a resilience-enhancing effect. Purpose creates the motivation that drives the change in behavior.

Combine these strategies, along with crystal clear goals--everyone must understand their roles and responsibilities and be willing to put the effort in to get the results--and you create the motivation for a winning team. Bryant

also reminded us that in order to have a winner, “The team must have a feeling of unity; every player must put the team first, ahead of personal glory.” His philosophy still applies today, perhaps now more than ever.

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