

5 Things We Learned about Leadership from the Super Bowl



There is no doubt about it – in the USA, business and sports are closely intertwined.

Often the Super Bowl's success is measured in how many people watched specific advertisements, how many gallons of beer were sold or how many chicken wings were consumed.

When looking at this from a leadership perspective, however, Super Bowl Sunday raised some important questions. As a leading expert on establishing how business leaders can learn about vision, team strategy and employee engagement from the best head coaches in football, I can assure you that paying attention to these questions—and the answers they suggest—can have a huge impact on your business.

Question 1: Who was MVP in the Super Bowl?

I have read many articles on this topic and what is interesting is that most commentators do not look beyond the players on the playing field. In actuality, the Super Bowl was won more than two years ago when John Elway decided to change his team from being No. 1 in NFL offense to No. 1 in defense. Everyone knows the defense wins Super Bowls, so why would you want to concentrate on the offense? When considering their own business teams, how many leaders can honestly say that they plan in this fashion? For this reason I contend that John Elway should have been the MVP; without his vision the Broncos would not have won.

Lesson 1: Have a strong vision you can sell to all stakeholders

Question 2: Why were the Broncos so dominant?

Elway's decision to hire Gary Kubiak as head coach and Wade Phillips as defensive coordinator was strategic. Working together, their vision was executed to perfection against the Panthers (who were No. 1 in offense), taking the game and the championship.

Lesson 2: Surround yourself with people who can deliver your vision

Question No. 3: Who was the architect of this dominance?

Although the players delivered and executed the strategy it was Phillips who was the architect. Given the way the Broncos dealt not only with the Panthers' offense but also

nullified the Patriots' offense and defense, the architect is surely the coach. How many coaches of this caliber do you have in your senior management team?

Lesson No. 3: There is no substitute for having specialist coaches on your team who can deliver results.

Question No. 4: Why did the Broncos' vision matter?

Leaders always talk about vision. But how many of them have such clarity that they could paint a picture for their teams that could be easily understood and practiced? In football this is done on a daily basis. Ask any head coach whom they would love to have on their team and they could answer in a heartbeat. They have that clarity of vision that most business leaders lack.

Lesson No. 4: Have a vision for who will be on your team when you reach your target. If you do not know who the players should be at that time you will not reach your target.

Question No. 5: How can leaders be more like Elway, Kubiak and Phillips?

As a leader you have to be open to changing the way your corporation gets things done or you won't succeed. Clearly in the Broncos' case there was a need to change the focus and vision in order to achieve their ultimate goal. If you study the best people from any walk of life you will learn something. Meanwhile if you study top football coaches and how they not only have a vision to achieve their ultimate goal but also how to staff for that, eventually you will learn something that will help you become a far better leader.

Lesson No. 5: Never be afraid to change strategies in order to deliver your vision.

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