

WHO SHOULD LEAD YOUR HIGH-PERFORMANCE TEAM



By Brandon Marcello, PhD

People often ask me what it takes to be a successful high-performance director, and who should be doing it? Should it be a physician, sports scientist, strength and conditioning coach, athletic trainer, or any other positions one can find on most pro teams today?

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Many teams look at what other organizations have done before making this critical decision. Unfortunately, sometimes it's a true blunder. What they discover over the course of a few years or even sooner is that their system isn't working as expected. I've had numerous organizations speak to me about this very problem as they search for their next solution.

In my opinion, as someone who had laid a lot of track in the high-performance world, I don't think a particular discipline holds the keys to the high-performance kingdom. However, as I have witnessed elsewhere and my own experience has shown, I personally am the very best high-performance director (HPD) when I'm conducting the orchestra and not running the bases or dribbling the ball.

Why a conductor? Of all the roles out there – both within the world of sports and without – I believe it's the closest comparison to my vision of a truly high-performance HPD.

ON MANAGING AND DIRECTING

Conductors: Conduct/manage the orchestra, and choose the musical pieces to perform.

HPDs: Conducts/manages the high-performance team, and chooses the direction in which the performance team functions within the organization.

ON PLAYING TOGETHER

Conductors: Because a symphony orchestra plays in concert with one another, it is the conductor's job to ensure that everyone is playing the same selection of music, on the same page of that music, playing their own instruments when they should be playing them, and ensuring that one group isn't playing too loudly or too softly.

HPDs: Because the high-performance team must work in concert with one another, it's the HPD who ensures that everyone on the performance team is on the same page, functioning within their strengths, at the right time, and ensuring that everyone is keeping within their respective lanes of expertise.

ON STAFFING AND PRACTICE

Conductors: Determine who sits in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd chair for each instrument and ensure the orchestra practices so they can perform when needed.

HPDs: Determine staffing, hierarchy, and organizational structure for each discipline and establish an environment of learning so that those on the team can learn, evolve, and get better at their respective crafts.



ON TRUST

Conductors: The conductor Charles Hazlewood gave an exceptional TED Talk called “Trusting the Ensemble.” During this talk he said “... *There has to be, between me and the orchestra, an unshakable bond of trust, born out of mutual respect, through which we can spin a musical narrative that we all believe in.*”

HPDs: Borrowing from Hazlewood’s words, there has to be trust between the HPD and the high-performance team, an unshakable bond of trust, born out of mutual respect through which we can spin a performance narrative that all members of the team can believe in.

ON CREDIT

Conductors: At the end of the performance, the conductor faces the audience, acknowledges them, and then raises his/her hands to acknowledge the orchestra. This is key, because conductors diverts all attention and applause away from themselves, and toward those who ultimately performed.

HPDs: An exceptional HPD gives all of the credit to their staff and the athletes they work with. At the end of the day a HPD just gives direction, empowerment, and respect to their colleagues.

ON EXPERIENCE

Conductors: It is rare that a conductor knows how to play every instrument within the orchestra. However, they do understand how

each instrument sounds, they have an appreciation and understanding for each piece, and they know what the various pieces do well and their limitations.

HPDs: HP directors don’t have to know how to practice medicine, be a strength coach or dietician, wrap an ankle, etc., but they do need to understand and appreciate the different backgrounds of each discipline along with what they do well and their limitations.

PERSONALITY OF THE LEADER

Personality is also a significant part of the equation. So if you have time, I would recommend you watch Itay Talgam’s TED Talk titled “Leading Like the Great Conductors.” I couldn’t agree more with his sentiments about how the personality of a leader is the driver of how orchestras (and teams) perform.

Lastly, I’m often asked “Where should I look for this person?” I don’t even need to rehearse my response. It’s as simple as this: “Go to the philharmonic, and here is my CV.” If the situation is right, maybe I’ll be that person. After twenty years of international and national coaching and consulting with the military and in pro and Olympic sports, I’m looking for the next challenge and my next orchestra to lead.



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