

"There are two types of people who will tell you that you cannot make a difference in this world: those who are afraid to try and those who are afraid you will succeed."

» **Ray Goforth**



Luck Is Earned

I was clicking around a website recently and found a video that brought a smile.

It featured a story I shared in speeches many years ago.

Yet, the story of Steven Bradbury resonated with me anew in 2020. His was a saga of years of hardships and setbacks on the way to becoming Australia's first Olympic speed skating gold medalist.

I actually remember watching that race live on TV back in 2002.

I met one of the race favorites, Apollo Ohno, at a banking event the year before the Olympics and was rooting for him.

This became the infamous race in which the four leaders became entangled in the final turn and went down.

Bradbury avoided the crash and won.

I remember screaming at the time that it wasn't fair. It was obvious that the four fastest skaters on that day hadn't won the race.



A Fair Assessment

I've often asked manager groups to share the traits they believe are important in an effective leader.

I've heard all the responses you'd expect – motivator, communicator, hard worker, etc.

Then, I suggest one trait that is seldom mentioned that I believe is one of the most important in building morale and unity.

I imagine it's seldom listed because it's assumed. It shouldn't be.

That critical leadership trait is fairness. When I've pointed that out, I've sometimes observed folks who seem to think that's just so basic a trait that it can go unmentioned.

I mean, of course, leaders should be fair to each of the members of their teams!

No one ever disagrees with that. They shouldn't.

In practice, however, it requires more effort than some realize.

It wasn't until learning Bradbury's full story many years later that I came to believe the right guy won the medal.

His story (easily found online) of overcoming terrible accidents over years of training are truly Aussie-level intense.

One accident nearly killed him from loss of blood and another nearly paralyzed him.

Those are only two of the instances that would have caused most sane individuals to find a safer endeavor.

Still he chased his dream. When the 2002 Olympics came around, he had earned his chance to compete with the best in the world.

While obviously a world-class skater, he was nowhere near the top of the rankings and not considered a medal contender.

In fact, it took another skater getting disqualified in the semis to get him into the final race.

In the finals, he stayed with the world's best for much of the race before falling well behind on the final lap.

Then, the crash took place ahead of him and he avoided contact to cross the finish line just ahead of a lunging Ohno.

Aussie Aussie Aussie! Oi Oi Oi!

While some focused on the "lucky breaks" that produced that result, Bradbury truly earned his "luck."

He didn't quit when most would have through the years. Then, on the verge of seeing his dream go unfulfilled, he still didn't pull up. He gave his best effort even as defeat appeared imminent.

That continued effort put him in position for the unlikely win.

Most of us have valid excuses to pull up this year.

Being fair is different than being nice. Don't get me wrong, I'm a big proponent of being nice.

But being fair sometimes requires negative feedback and corrective actions.

Sure, you can still be nice while doing those things. (Yes, you can.)

However, being fair involves keeping everyone accountable.

For example, it tends to be easier for some leaders to give recognition to folks giving extra effort than it is to correct and coach folks who are giving poor effort.

They do one and not the other.

Now, I'm not talking purely about results. Results are not always controllable.

Effort, however, is.

The thinking seems to be that as long as the most conscientious and hardest workers are acknowledged, all is good.

Over time, however, even our more dedicated team members can become demoralized when it appears that standards are more like "suggestions" than actual standards.

At a minimum, it might cause otherwise highly conscientious folks to question whether they are being taken advantage of.

That may sound harsh. We're kidding ourselves, however, if we pretend it doesn't happen.

These chaotic times have shuffled many folks' responsibilities and duties.

Being objectively fair to folks in different jobs and situations may be harder than usual.

Yet, it's more important than ever.

Encourage and recognize those folks carrying more than their share of the load these days.

Those who keep their heads (and efforts) up, however, will earn the “lucky breaks” around the turn.

But do what you can as well to ensure that everyone is carrying their fair share.

Be positive. Be a motivator when possible.

But always strive to be fair to all.

"You never regret being kind."

» Nicole Shepherd

Dave Martin, author of The In-Store Advantage, has become one of the most prolific writers in the banking industry. His keynote presentations, seminars, and podcasts have an authenticity and humor that brings teams of all sizes and seniority levels together.

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