

Sports, Mediation and Leadership

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It was not my intention to continue talking about the 2014 FIFA World Cup, as I am not a big football fan, and probably most of us have had enough of it over the last six weeks. However, Brazil's 7 x 1 knockout defeat to Germany is still in every Brazilian's mind. How this could happen, what went wrong and what the "football nation" can expect in the future are some of the questions still echoing in every corner of the country.

In my humble, not expert, football opinion, instead of asking ourselves "what went wrong", we should in fact be asking how Germany managed to do it.

Losing to Brazil in the 2002 World Cup final game and being eliminated in their own territory at the quarter finals of the 2006 World Cup triggered a warning sign that some drastic changes were needed in German football if they in fact wanted to become a truly winning team in modern football. Differently from Brazil, Argentina and Italy, countries like Spain, Holland and Germany, although respected football forces, lacked that "extra touch" when competing for the number one football spot.

After an in-depth (almost forced) research, I could go on forever outlining the stages and processes of how Germany managed to build such a strong team and, most importantly, a winning side. Needless to say that a realistic self-appraisal, detailed planning, clear objectives (at different levels of the game), training, talent recognition and development were at the top of their agenda. Does this sound familiar to us Mediators?

There is no doubt that talent, especially in sports, can still make a difference at the end of the day, but if the overall structure is not well built around the several processes that matter for achieving the pre-established goals (whether in sports, business or life), the chances of succeeding will unquestionably diminish.

"Who am I?", "where am I?", "where do I want to be?" and "how do I get there?" are some of the fundamental questions that need to be addressed for those seeking to achieve both personal and collective (team) objectives.

The above questions do not differ much from those used by mediators in their quest to achieving satisfactory results. However, there are also some additional points which can never be neglected in any mediation (or team building) process:

- 1) Do an in-depth analysis and understand each participating member;
- 2) Have a motivational point (an objective) that can unite every member involved in the process;
- 3) Develop a common agenda;
- 4) Foster team spirit, as there is no place for individual or lone performances anymore;
- 5) Avoid short-cuts or quick fixes, as they may appear satisfactory at first but their results are not sustainable in the long run;
- 6) Prepare yourself mentally - the discipline with the yoga sessions were an excellent example;
- 7) Do not focus on one technique only. Be versatile and ready to apply different approaches as the situation requires.

Finally, trust and respect for the leader should be earned and not imposed. It should also be clearly understood that the leader's role (whether a mediator, conductor, coach or manager), although very important, is not more important than the role of all the others involved in the process. If that is achieved, as Joachim Low (the German coach) managed to achieve with his extraordinary group of players and supporting staff, the chances towards reaching the planned results are very high.

I wonder how Joachim Low would be as a mediator...