



Coach K: Leader and Friend

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¹ <http://www.geocities.com/truedukeblue03/champions.html>

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Introduction

Michael William Krzyzewski, often referred to as “Coach K”, is currently the Head Men’s Basketball Coach at Duke University. In 1981, Krzyzewski was hired by Duke because of the recommendation from his former coach Bobby Knight. After some difficult early seasons, the Duke Men’s Basketball program has become one of the most successful college basketball programs of all times. In his 23 years at Duke, Coach K has been named the National Coach of the Year 12 times in eight different seasons by major organizations. He has built a dynasty that few college coaches in the history of the Basketball game can match. Mike Krzyzewski was named “America’s Best Coach” in 2001 by Time Magazine and CNN and enshrined in the Basketball Hall of Fame. Coach K once said that “I don't look at myself as a basketball coach. I look at myself as a leader who happens to coach basketball” (“Coach K”, 2005). This paper will analyze his unique leadership from four frames focusing mainly on the human resources and symbolic frames. The financial revenues associated with collegiate basketball will also be discussed, as well as the role of athletics in the administrative structure at Duke. The relationships between Coach K and his family, his players, and his fans will also be inspected. After this analysis, the ideals generated from Coach K will be applied to leadership style in real business environments.

Human Resource Frame

The human resource aspect of Coach K and his leadership style is rather fascinating. After studying his methods of coaching it is easy to realize he cares deeply about his players and all those around him. Mike Krzyzewski is certainly a Theory Y coach. Theory Y states that it is the task of management (in this case Coach K) to set up conditions in which people achieve their goals by directing their efforts towards organizational (team) rewards (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 119). He pushes and challenges his players to work harder and do their best for the basketball team. Coach K believes that this will lead to winning games and even national championships. The human resource

frame states that in order to succeed there must be a great investment in people (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 129). Coach K invests a great deal of time in his players to improve their skills and the ability of the team to work together. This investment in time will in turn lead to success for Coach K, the basketball program, and his players both on and off the court. Mike Krzyzewski's players have great resources available to them to help in their efforts to become a professional basketball player.

There are several human resource principles that can provide guidance and direction for the organization. Among them are building and implementating human resources management strategy, hiring the right people, keeping them, investing in them, and empowering them. The human resource frame also says that an enterprise should surround themselves with a "core group of managers with skills and capacities critical to the enterprise" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 124); the enterprise in this case being Duke University, and the managers being Coach K and his staff. All three of Coach K's assistant coaches are former players, which is his way of ensuring that there are others available to enforce his methods of teaching and coaching. Duke has solidified this core group of managers by signing Coach K to a lifetime contract. A crucial step is hiring the right people, both assistant coaches and players. Mike Krzyzewski and his assistants must recruit individuals who will fit into their program, have opportunities to grow, and have talent.

Another important principle is keeping both his players and assistants from year to year. It is important that Coach K instill a sense of pride and commitment in his players and assistants. A big problem in college basketball is players leaving school early to join the NBA. In most cases the player has not finished school, and the incentives offered by the NBA are too monetarily great. Investing and empowering players and assistant coaches is a way to keep them at Duke. Both Coach

K and his assistants must study each player individually to learn their skills and how they best respond to authority. They must also learn how everyone interacts with each other and the different player combinations that can be on the court at one time and be effective. Assistant coaches must feel as though they hold some power, from developing plays to recruiting high school players. Players must also be allowed to review game tapes to allow them to assess their own strengths and weaknesses as well as prepare for upcoming opponents. The players have to want to stay on the team – and most that play for Mike Krzyzewski – stay.

Symbolic Frame

The symbolic frame might be considered from two perspectives in the Coach K case: by viewing Mike Krzyzewski as a symbolic leader, and by looking at Duke University's basketball team as organization. There is a cult following of Coach K, and he definitely has his temple. "It is not like he's a deity. But sometimes when he is up there [in his office] he does look like Saruman" (Perlow, Snook, & Delacey, 2004, p. 1). The name Coach K itself is a symbol of Duke's basketball success and a symbol of the future for many freshmen. Duke would not be Duke without Mike Krzyzewski. The following seven points are the traits that a symbolic leader has, as well as a comparison to the traits that Coach K has; as defined by Bolman and Deal on pages 361-364:

- 1) *Be a hero*: Coach K is a legend for college basketball, and proves his quality by being honored with the title of "National Coach of the Year" and many others (Perlow, Snook, & Delacey, 2004, p. 1).
- 2) *Lead by example*: in his basketball player and coach careers, he committed to coaching and inspiring others - "He had more confidence in me than I had myself" (Perlow, Snook, & Delacey, 2004, p. 3).
- 3) *Use symbols myth/legends*: Mike Krzyzewski is a legend for Duke University; and participates in rituals such welcoming newcomers and cutting the basketball net after each game; as shown in the video *Beyond The Glory* during Coach McVean's presentation. He uses metaphors to teach his points, such as "Five Fingers and a Fist" (Perlow, Snook, & Delacey, 2004, p. 4).
- 4) *Frame experience*: Coach K interprets the past experience and shows how it might help them now. For example, the loss against Stanford in 2000 was a motivating factor for the team to play better in the following season (Perlow, Snook, & Delacey, 2004, p. 3).

5) *Communicate a vision*: Mike Krzyzewski sets an important goal for each player (Perlow, Snook, & Delacey, 2004, p. 2). As shown in the video *Beyond The Glory* shown during the Coach McVean presentation, Coach K “will define [his] own success and failure”.

6) *Share values with constituents*: “Five fundamental Qualities” - trust, communication, collective responsibility, caring, and pride. Coach K promotes these values through family environment, a hard work ethic, mutual commitment, coaching, and togetherness (Perlow, Snook, & Delacey, 2004, p. 3-5).

7) *Build and support relationships with team members*: Mike Krzyzewski flies with players in the economic class, invites them to visit his house and spend time with his family, and visits his current and former players if they are in hospitals.

Duke University itself uses the symbolic frame in their operations. Each organization is a theatre (actors play roles and communicate the right impression on the right audience) and a temple (a community of faith, bonded by shared beliefs and ceremonies) at the same time (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 270). There are several important principals of the symbolic frame such as welcoming and mentoring younger players, using diversity as a team competitive advantage, creating their own language, “KrzyzewskiVille”, and the naming of the basketball court in Mike Krzyzewski’s honor – “Coach K Court” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 289-290).

Coach K plays a number of roles in Duke University: a coach, a faculty member at Duke’s business school, a spokesman for the university, and a special advisor to the university president. He changes his behavior according to the needs of audience, following the rule: “new audiences require revisions in actors, scripts, or settings” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 276). Mike Krzyzewski, or Coach K, is now a brand name with a visual image, a story with values around it.

Political Frame

When referring to Coach K's decision to move from Duke to Los Angeles, there are a number of different aspects to examine within the political framework. The most straightforward way of examining each of those aspects is through the assumptions of the political frame. The first

assumption, according to Bolman & Deal, states that, "Organizations are coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups" (2003, p. 186). This assumption clearly applies to the Blue Devils' level, the Duke University level, and the more complex societal level involving the L.A. Lakers. The Duke team itself is a diverse group of players, each coming from different background, each with "different values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 186) all subscribing to the second assumption - that of enduring differences. These assumptions apply to the Duke University level - each member of the organization, be it a member of the faculty or administration, or one of the hundreds of students camped out in 'K-ville' - is unique and subscribes to the first two assumptions. In reviewing the third assumption we find that, according to Bolman & Deal, "most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources" (2003, p. 186). That scarce resource, at every level - the team, the university, and the world - is Coach K. Understanding that Coach K is the scarce resource, we look to Bolman & Deal's fourth assumption, "scarce resources and enduring differences make conflict central to organizational dynamics and underline power as the most important asset" (2003, p. 186). This applies immensely at all levels with the power that these considerations give Coach K, being as scarce as he is. The conflict exists on many levels, such as between the Lakers and the University, and between Coach K himself and his own future. This brings us, finally, to Bolman & Deal's last political assumption, "goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among competing stakeholders" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 186). Nowhere is this more true than at the societal level - the competing stakeholders being the Lakers, Duke, and Coach K - who holds all the power in this conflict. Despite all of the potential power holders in this scenario, there exists only one authority, and the rest of the members of the conflict exist only as partisans. The authority is of course, Coach K, as he is the only member to hold any real power over the decision to be made: "[his] role entitles [him] to make decisions binding" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 193). From the student fans of K-

Town, to the Duke Athletic Director, to the Duke President Richard Brodhead, to the Blue Devils and Lakers themselves, all that any other party could do was "[attempt] to exert bottom-up influence" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 193). Despite all their attempts at bottom-up influence, though, the only person with the authority - the power - to make the decision was Coach K.

All other parties in this conflict were partisans, and each had their own source of power. For instance, the Athletic Director and President of Duke each held positional power. The President certainly had access and control of agendas. The Lakers held control of rewards – should have Coach K. joined them; they would make it well worth his while. The Duke fans themselves arguably even held some amount of coercive power. Any number of these stakeholders all also held personal power as well as potential access to alliances and networks. Through any of these sources of power, should any group feel the need to influence Coach K more than they already had, they needed to only increase their use of these alternate sources of power. Mike Krzyzewski held a number of these sources of power. However, three specific sources are far and away the most important in his life. The first is information and expertise, the reason why he is in such high demand by so many parties. The second is alliances and networks, which allowed him to get to where he is today – thanks to his friend and mentor Bob Knight. Finally, Krzyzewski has to have an immeasurable amount of personal power to have come so far and been so successful.

Structural Frame

“The assumptions of the structural frame are reflected in current approaches to social architecture and organizational design” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 44). These assumptions reflect a belief in rationality, formal relationships, and rule-oriented structures. The structural frame leader defines formal expectations and responsibilities of each player in the organization. Like an animal’s skeleton, structure both enhances and constrains what an organization can accomplish. There are

two design issues are the heart of structural frame: differentiation and integration (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 49). Differentiation means that a structural frame leader needs to learn how to allocate work among each individual. Integration is the method of coordinating roles and developing units as a working team once responsibilities have been defined. Coach K can be defined as a structural frame leader. Based on his understanding of each player's strengths and weakness, he then specifies different positions or roles for each player in the team. Creating these roles yields the benefits of specialization as each individual focuses on his priorities. The second key challenge for Mike Krzyzewski is to have every player work as a team, putting group goals before the individual goals. He uses the metaphor of "five fingers and a fist" to describe the integration task. He defined his team philosophy as following:

"I look at the members of the team like the five fingers of a hand. Some hands have small fingers that easily come together as a fist. Other hands have very large fingers, but, if they never come together as a fist, they probably won't be as powerful as the smaller hand that does...(My) goal as a leader is to create a dominant team where all five fingers fit together into a powerful fist..." (Perlow, Snook, & Delacey, 2004)

A successful basketball season requires high coordination and teamwork among each player as success depends on the effort of everyone. The task of integration is extremely important for basketball. Successful organizations employ a variety of methods to link individual goals with group goals. They can do so vertically through the formal chain of command or laterally through meeting, coordinating roles, or network structure (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 50). Although Coach K has absolute authority to make decisions and direct each player, he does not use this method. He builds trust from players by establishing close relationships. The relationship between him and his players goes beyond the normal relationships developed between a coach and players. The basketball team in essence becomes part of Coach K's family – each player being like son to him. Because of this trust and close relationship, the five fingers are molded and fit together closely into a fist; resulting in

a basketball team that achieves amazing outcomes, something that they never could have done without the coaching and guidance of Mike Krzyzewski.

Some people think that the structural frame is too rigid to be used. But the truth is that this process can be a source of tremendous competitive advantage which has been shown through Coach K's approach to motivate his players. He has helped them learn how improve their individual skills and coordinate their talents to create a formidable team which excels in a highly competitive environment, catapulting his team to the one of the best in the nation.

Finance & Administration

Financially, the college basketball game presents a very complicated, profitable and expensive proposition for division one schools. In the case of Duke University, the salary of Coach Krzyzewski is even higher than that of the university's president (Carlton, 2004). Coach K, as many call him, made approximately \$743,000 in annual salary (Carlton). In addition to this, \$65,000 was contributed to his pension, as well as a personal expense account of approximately \$519,000 (Carlton). Only considering the amount that Duke University pays him, he is annually compensated approximately \$1.3 million dollars (Carlton). Coach K's salary dwarfs the president of the university's salary, which in 2003 was \$485,000, with \$44,000 contributed to his pension, and no expense account (Fiscal Year 2003 Form 990). This salary does not include any outside sources of income.

Coach Krzyzewski receives additional income from outside sources. These sources include doing endorsements with companies such as Nike, radio and talk shows, advertisements and corporate seminars (Carlton, 2004). A good example to understand the gravity of the amount that these outside contracts carry is Adidas. "Adidas paid Duke Coach Mike Krzyzewski \$375,000 a year and a

\$1 million bonus to outfit his team in Adidas instead of Nike gear they had been wearing” (Platt, 2001). Sponsorship like this is common throughout the division 1 sport teams. It should be noted however that coach’s salary, such as Coach Krzyzewski tend to be a small percentage of typical coaching salaries. On average, with all benefits included, coaches for a major sport earned just over \$77,000 a year (Workplace Channel, 2005).

The universities themselves profit incredibly off the basketball sports games. “During a run of strong hoops seasons in the mid-’90s, for instance, admissions applications at the university of Massachusetts experienced double-digit increases for two consecutive years” (Platt, 2001). With an increase in applications, brings increased revenue through more accepted students, bringing in over \$167,000 per student for a four year program (Duke Financial Aid, 2005). Considering the widespread coverage of the March Madness games, this increase in admissions is more then likely experienced by all top placing colleges. In addition to the increased revenue experienced by the increase in admissions; there is the revenue made from tickets sales, clothes and other souvenir products averages – approximately \$6 million (Platt). In Duke’s case, according to their Form 990, this amount in 2003 was \$42 million. As the auxiliary stores report states “The success of our basketball team contributed to our operational success” (Duke Stores Operations, 1999).

The administrative relationship Coach K has with Duke University is extremely powerful and influential. In 1998, Coach K was promoted to the Assistant to the Athletic Director, in addition to his responsibilities as head basketball coach (Selinsky, 2001). This gave him “marketing, development, and strategy behind ... [the] program” (Selinsky). Administratively, the coach has both power and influence; but his influence far outstrips his power in the organization. “I’m running a big business, a business that has impact on university business, Duke Hospital business,

and our national image” (Selinsky). In his interviews, Coach Krzyzewski has said that “he prefers to be called “influential,” rather than powerful. “I think it’s more important to be influential, to possess the ability to have people listen to you and follow you so that you can help bring about positive change” (Selinsky). Administratively speaking, Coach K is very close to the President of the University – only one person lies between him and the President – the Director of Athletics (Duke University, 2004). Combined together, Mike Krzyzewski had tremendous amounts of power and influence at Duke University.

Constituencies

There are many constituencies in the case, “Coach K: Five Fingers and a Fist” that relate to Coach K and Duke University. Constituencies are groups or bodies that patronize, support or offer representation. One constituency in the case is the players, because they are a good representation of the strong relationship that Coach K inspires to have between himself and his team. Another constituency is the faculty and staff because they support Mike Krzyzewski as the coach of Duke’s basketball team. A third constituency found in the case is the alumni. In the case, some of the alumni represented were old basketball players for Coach K that moved on to the NBA because of the skills and teamwork they developed with him. The community is another constituency – Mike Krzyzewski was not only looked up to by his players and other students, but also by fans outside in the community who would be devastated to lose Coach K as Duke’s coach.

Characters

There are many characters in the case and in Coach Krzyzewski’s life that had a relationship or were impacted by Coach K in some way. The important characters in the case that had a relationship to Coach K and Duke were Bob Knight, the Duke Basketball players, the fans, Kobe Bryant, and Duke President Richard Brodhead. Each of these characters connected to Coach K as a basketball coach and a person.

Bob Knight

Bob Knight is legendary to the life of Coach K. He taught Mike Krzyzewski many lessons which he continues to pass on to his basketball players. One of the lessons that Bob Knight taught was to care for his players and to treat them as family. When Coach K played basketball for Bob Knight, Knight drove Coach K through a snowstorm to get home when his father died (Perlow, Snook, & DeLacey, 2004, p. 2). Moments like that were what helped Coach K to become who he is today. Bob Knight further helped Coach K and Duke by recommending Coach K to the basketball team (Perlow, Snook, & DeLacey, 2004, p. 2). Bob Knight helped begin Coach K's career with Duke and his relationship with Coach K also benefited Duke because they gained a very successful coach.

The Players

The basketball players on Coach K's team were also very influential. The players shown in the case were used to express the relationship that Coach K had with his players. It helped to show the kind of coach that Mike Krzyzewski was and how the players looked up to him. The theory that Krzyzewski implemented with his team about the "five fingers and a fist" was an example of the strong relationship and bond that Coach K developed with his team and among his players (Perlow, Snook, & DeLacey, 2004, p. 4). The players on Duke's basketball team felt like they were a part of a family because of Coach K. Grant Hill, a former Duke player who has moved on to the NBA, said of Coach K's teaching style: "It's like a parent" (Perlow, Snook, & DeLacey, 2004, p. 4). Bobby Hurley, another player for Duke, recalled when he was being recruited they would watch movies at Coach K's house and it just felt like a family atmosphere (Perlow, Snook, & DeLacey, 2004, p. 4). Coach K also tried to end disputes among players before anything serious happened to avoid damage to the relationship the players had with each other. A good example of this in the case was during a practice when a conflict arose between Shane Battier and Jason Williams, ultimately resolved through verbal mediation and trust (Perlow, Snook, & DeLacey, 2004, p. 3).

The Fans

Coach K also has a good relationship with his fans, whom he considers to be the “6th player” on his team. Coach K coaches the fans in how to be active and supportive at the games, but if the fans become out of control then Coach K intervenes (Perlow, Snook, & DeLacey, 2004). The fans of Duke’s basketball team look up to Coach K as well. A good example of fan loyalty to Coach K at Duke is the letter written to Coach K from Andrew Humphries, a junior at Duke. He wrote a moving letter to Coach K during the time that the LA Lakers were trying to recruit Coach K; the letter was so moving that it brought both Coach K and his wife to tears and helped them make the decision to stay with Duke (“Student’s letter”, 2005). The fans look up to Coach K and as fan Jon Park said, “it would be devastating to the future basketball recruits and the community at Duke if they lost Coach K” (Perlow, Snook, & DeLacey, 2004, p. 8).

Kobe Bryant

Another character in the case study that looked up to Coach K was Kobe Bryant. Kobe Bryant, a franchise player for the LA Lakers, came in to the case to show how badly the Lakers wanted Mike Krzyzewski as their coach. Bryant was a very strong advocate of hiring Coach K and felt that Coach K would be a much better asset to the Lakers, then the previous coach Phil Jackson, who he had feuded with (Perlow, Snook, & DeLacey, 2004, p. 6). Kobe Bryant shows how other basketball players outside of Duke University look up to and respect Mike Krzyzewski.

The President

Duke’s president, Richard H. Brodhead, also had a very good relationship with Coach K. Brodhead knows how important Coach K has become to Duke’s basketball team as well as to the rest of the University. Brodhead mentions in the case just how important Coach K is to the entire University other than just his record of victories (Perlow, Snook, & DeLacey, 2004, p. 5). Brodhead says of Coach K, “he’s a real teacher. He teaches character as well as basketball” (Perlow, Snook, &

DeLacey, 2004, p. 5). This is evident again in Coach K's relationship with the players, how he settles problems, and his theories and lessons which he passes on to his players.

Concluding Remarks

After analyzing the "Coach K" case, there are several characteristics that can be borrowed from Coach K leadership style to be used by managers. In this case we looked over special tools that might be applicable to any manager such as leading by example, using symbols, telling stories, communicating vision, sharing and supporting values, and building relationships. This symbolic frame is very helpful in any manager's career. Using these techniques can make your management style engrained into the culture; becoming a brand name image for the company. In looking to Coach K's career as an example of the political frame, there are a number of lessons that can be learned. Of all of those lessons, arguably the most important is one's awareness of the available sources of power, one's own sources of power, and the sources of power that others have. Knowing these in and of itself gives one distinct political power, which can be used to subtly influence other members of an organizations, build coalitions, and achieve one's own organizational goals. There were several constituencies with a relationship to Coach K and the Duke Basketball team. Every organization will have constituencies and groups that make up the organization in its entirety. There will always be relationships among members and parts of the organization that will support and represent each other. It is important to know what these constituencies are and develop strong relationships throughout the organization to increase your effectiveness as a manager. Coach K has been able to be an effective coach and leader for over two decades because he has applied the human resources frame effectively. If managers apply his style to business models, setting up the conditions of the organization so that the players (in this case employees) achieve their goals by directing their efforts towards the organization, businesses will also become very effective. Coach K uses differentiation and integration – the heart of structural frame – to lead

the basketball team to victory. As leaders in the organization, managers need to learn how to allocate and coordinate work among workers based on their strengths and weaknesses. Coach K, by applying all four frames correctly, and paying attention to his constituencies, has created a tremendous amount of financial wealth for both Duke University and himself. For managers, applying all the frames at the correct times will enable the business to become much more profitable on whole, ultimately increasing the salary of the manager in the end. Ultimately, being driven solely by increased profits, a unhealthy lust for power, a steady push for more bureaucracy, too much elaboration on stories and heroes, or being so interested in people's lives that nothing gets done will only hurt an organization in the end. A balance of these complex interactions, as demonstrated by Mike Krzyzewski, will produce a great leader and catapult that organization ahead: "I don't look at myself as a basketball coach. I look at myself as a leader who happens to coach basketball" ("Coach K", 2005).

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