



Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Newsletter



What Team Sports Can Teach Us About DE&I

Former employment attorney and author Jathan Janove writes for SHRM Online on how to inject greater humanity into HR compliance. He welcomes your questions and suggestions for future columns. Contact him at the e-mail address at the end of this column.

Achieving diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) in the workplace continues to be a challenge for most organizations. Despite a substantial investment of time and money, many companies aren't reaching their DE&I goals. By contrast, in team sports, the principles of DE&I seem to be flourishing.

What is it about team sports that makes achieving DE&I easier? What lessons can employers learn? Here are a few characteristics that differentiate the typical workplace from a sports team.



Clear Goals Shared

In team sports, the goal is clear: win. Everyone, from coaches and players to administrators and support staff, cares about and shares the same goal of winning. They also share steppingstone goals—the various steps and signposts necessary to achieve the goal.

Team leaders make it their mission to ensure a collective understanding of and commitment to the same goals. By contrast, employees in most companies either lack a clear understanding of the organization's DE&I goals, or the goals are uninspiring. As a worker, how am I supposed to get fired up about this effort?

Christopher D. Lee, CHRO at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Va., makes another point about shared goals. "A boss can win while the employee loses, whereas a coach and a player either win together or they lose together."

Measuring What Matters

Sports teams don't waste time measuring meaningless subjective performance metrics. Don't expect the Lakers to give LeBron James an annual performance review. "Uh, LeBron, for the 2021-2022 season, we rate you a 3.5. Please try harder next season."

Sports teams continually identify and measure the metrics that matter—not just the ultimate result but also the contributing parts (depending on the sport), from games won to points scored to yardage gained and beyond.



Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Newsletter



Maximizing Strengths

How often have you had a boss ask, "How can I maximize your talents to help you succeed?" More likely, you were given a detailed job description to review and to which you were expected to conform. Your boss didn't adapt to you. You did the adapting. That approach leads to "that's not my job" thinking, as well as "that's how we've always done it here." Rigidity prevails.

By contrast, a good coach continually looks to identify, develop and maximize team members' strengths. This means being flexible and adapting as needed. [Karl Mecklenburg's](#) NFL career began inauspiciously. He was on the fringe. Things changed after his coach deduced that he would be better off playing linebacker—a position he'd never played before in his life. What followed? Six Pro Bowl selections, three Super Bowl appearances, and his induction into the Denver Broncos Ring of Honor and Colorado Sports Hall of Fame.

How many bosses have you had who worked to make you feel included?

Accountability at All Levels

In most companies, accountability tends to be transactional: "Follow the rules and keep your job." On good sports teams, accountability takes a different tack and starts at the individual level. Each player feels a personal obligation to support the team.

Notice how often, when asked, the star of the losing team says, "I have to get better." The player doesn't point the finger elsewhere. It's not "them"—it's "I."

Accountability also extends from team member to team member. There is a willingness to call out a colleague if needed for the betterment of the team. And the coach represents ultimate accountability. From individual to peer to authority figure, accountability pervades.

Discipline and Discharge

Readers of my column know that I'm no fan of "[progressive](#)" discipline. In my view, it's a demoralizing, judgment-based, punishment-oriented approach that's ineffective and tends to combine insult with injury.



In sports, there's no margin for letting things fester. If you're underperforming, your coach will proactively let you know what the gap is between what's needed and where you are—no ambiguity [and no avoidance](#). Also, there's no "first, second, third warning" nonsense. "Breanna Stewart, you shot 2 for 12 in yesterday's game. Therefore, we are putting you on Corrective Action, Step One." There's no dwelling on the past. No one's giving out report cards. The focus remains on the future.

If a player is fired (cut), it's not because the player is a failed human being. It's simply that the coach believes there's someone else who can better help the team win.



Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Newsletter



"Some organizations, such as Precision Tools Service in Columbus, Ind., are replacing the traditional command-and-control management model with a coaching approach. Leaders and HR there have made a "Culture Commitment" that is posted in all of its facilities and used as a basis for training, coaching and talent development. It lists the following traits of a coach-leader:

- Acts more like a coach and mentor than a traditional command-and-control "boss."
- Combines humility, courage and discipline.
- Leads by listening versus telling.
- When it comes to job expectations, responsibility and accountability, treats people fairly and consistently. Demonstrates genuine interest in employees' ideas, contributions, growth and development.

As a Japanese-owned company operating in North America, one of our diversity challenges relates to native origin and language," said Precision's executive vice president Tsutomu Ehara. "We're finding that a coaching culture helps us with this challenge."

Added HR director Diana Stephens, "In addition to promoting DE&I, a coaching culture enables HR to be seen as less of a 'compliance cop' and more as a coach helping our leaders lead."

Similar efforts are underway at Bridge Property Management, a national property management company based in Sandy, Utah. Company leadership has made a commitment to replace a traditional "boss" culture with a coaching culture, in which each leader:

- Ensures that everyone on the team shares the same goals and empowers others to use their abilities to best achieve goals.
- Actively listens to employees in order to engage and learn from them.
- Generously shares credit and recognition and accepts responsibility when things go wrong.
- Doesn't hesitate to confront others, yet does so with a solution-oriented mindset versus a blame-oriented approach.

"I've been in sports almost my entire life," said company president Matt DeGraw, "from participating in competitive sports in my youth, to coaching competitive sports as an adult, and I remain active in many sports as a hobby and actively watch sports as a fan."

DeGraw explained that "A good coach holds his or her team accountable to the goals of the team and helps ensure that each teammate holds each other accountable to fulfill the team mission. At Bridge Property Management, we are promoting a coaching culture to further our DE&I goals and to create a strong sense of team."

To create a DE&I-rich work environment, start thinking like a coach. Shift from traditional management thinking to a team sports model. And may your team win!





Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Newsletter



"What is Mental Health Awareness Month?"

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a national observance started in 1949 by Mental Health America to bring attention to the importance of mental wellbeing. Across the country, individuals and organizations step up to raise awareness of and help address the challenges faced by people living with mental health conditions. Read on to learn more about this observance and how you can move mental health forward for yourself and others this month and all year long.

Why is Mental Health Awareness Important?

Despite recent strides in how our society approaches mental wellbeing, many Americans still don't have access to the high-quality, comprehensive treatment and care they need. Just take a look at some of the staggering data about mental health in the United States:

[1 in 5](#) U.S. adults experience mental illness each year.

Only [47.2%](#) of U.S. adults with mental illness received treatment in 2021.

[1 in 20](#) U.S. adults experience serious mental illness each year.

Only [65.4%](#) of U.S. adults with serious mental illness received treatment in 2021.

[1 in 6](#) U.S. youth have a mental health condition, but only half receive treatment.

[50%](#) of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24.



How Can I Support Mental Health Awareness?

You don't have to work in the behavioral health care field to help yourself and others thrive. Here are three things you can do this month to move mental health forward:

1. **Download our free toolkit above.** We've outlined several ways you can support your mental wellbeing and help others. Inside, you'll find tips, original content and resources!
2. **Get trained in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA).** You can [be the difference through MHFA](#), a course that teaches how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use challenges. Already trained? [Learn how](#) to become a MHFA Instructor!
3. **Raise your voice.** [Help us advocate](#) to expand access to mental health and substance use care and bring attention to the importance of mental wellbeing.



Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Newsletter



Resources & Articles

Where Can I Find Mental Health Resources?

Help is out there, and hope is possible. Here are some free resources to lean on if you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health and/or substance use crisis:

[SAMHSA's National Helpline](#) is a 24/7 treatment referral and information service.

[988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) offers 24/7, confidential support for people in distress.

[The Trevor Project](#) provides 24/7 crisis support services to LGBTQ+ young people.

[FindTreatment.gov](#) helps people seek treatment for mental and substance use disorders.

[National Institute of Mental Health](#) outlines additional mental health services.

Contact the OSAA

Oregon School Activities Association

25200 SW Parkway Ave. Suite 1

Wilsonville, OR 97070

503-682-6722

Monica Maxwell—monicam@osaa.org

Peter Weber—peterw@osaa.org

