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WHEN TALENT IS NOT ENOUGH

By Robert J. Tamasy

We see it in the sports world all the time. A seemingly more talented team losing, sometimes even being totally dominated, by a less-talented opponent. This is a common theme in theatrical films about sports, sort of a retelling of the David and Goliath story, the underdog prevailing over the heavy favorite – except with footballs, baseballs, basketballs, and hockey pucks instead of stones, swords, and spears.

But this phenomenon is not unique to athletic competition. We see this in other areas of life as well, including the business and professional world. One salesperson, having all the natural abilities anyone could ask for, seeing a less-talented, even less-experienced rival win an important account. Or a business that seemed to have all the advantages being overcome by a smaller but fiercely determined competitor. How does that happen?

Motivational speaker and consultant Tim Kight might have the answer, even though it is a simple one: “Discipline beats talent, when talent lacks discipline.”

Many people possess the “raw material,” things like intelligence, innate skill and talent, education, and formal training. Often, however, those are not enough to guarantee success. That is where discipline enters the equation. In the sporting world, this includes long periods of practice, weight training, countless hours studying the playbook, watching films of one’s own performance as well as upcoming opponents, investing the extra effort needed to excel.

What discipline looks like in the marketplace depends upon the specific field of endeavor, but in the end, it always looks the same – hard work, putting in as much time as necessary, thorough preparation, and a willingness to receive and welcome constructive criticism. Not everyone is willing to do these things, and this is why, as Kight says, discipline beats talent when talent lacks discipline.

Discipline is a key ingredient for spiritual growth, for becoming the person God intends for each of us to become – even in the workplace. Consider the following:

Discipline usually is not fun. When was the last time you saw someone training for a marathon or a triathlon event who was always smiling? Rarely, because even though it is necessary, rigorous training is not without difficulty. *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it”* (Hebrews 12:11).

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Discipline points us in the right direction. The most effective leaders are those who demonstrate discipline in their own conduct and work habits, setting strong, positive examples for those who follow them. *“He who heeds discipline shows the way of life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray”* (Proverbs 10:17).

Discipline in the form of correction improves performance. “None of us is as smart as all of us (together),” says one adage. The discipline of willingly receiving correction can help turn a good performer into a star performer. *“He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding”* (Proverbs 15:32)

© 2021. Robert J. Tamasy is the author of Marketplace Ambassadors: CBMC’s Continuing Legacy of Evangelism and Discipleship; Business at Its Best: Timeless Wisdom from Proverbs for Today’s Workplace; Pursuing Life With a Shepherd’s Heart (coauthored with Ken Johnson); and The Heart of Mentoring (coauthored with David A. Stoddard). Bob’s biweekly blog is: www.bobtamasy.blogspot.com.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of the statement, “Discipline beats talent, when talent lacks discipline”? Can you think of an example or two when you have seen this to be true?
2. When you think of the term *discipline*, what other words or images come to mind? Do you think discipline is undervalued in the marketplace today? Why or why not?
3. How disciplined do you think you are, both in your professional life and your personal life? Explain your answer.
4. It is stated that discipline is important for spiritual growth. Do you believe that? How do you think spiritual discipline would affect how someone carries out their job responsibilities – and would that be a good thing, in your view?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages: Proverbs 17:10, 19:16, 22:6, 27:17, 28:23; 2 Timothy 2:3-6; Hebrews 12:4-10

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