

FOCUS ON FAITH

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WINNING - AT ALL COSTS?

I'm writing this article at the outset of the 2007 Rugby World Cup as well as the day the England football team play Israel in a vital Euro 2008 qualifier. Having watched France (the hosts and some pundits outside selection for the World Cup) lose their opening match to Argentina last night, I guess I'm hoping that pre-match favourites England won't suffer the same fate today. It's a real day of sport – England play India in the deciding match of a seven game series of one-day cricket internationals, there is qualifying for the Italian F1 race tomorrow plus all the other usual fixtures and activities. If you don't want to watch sport on TV this weekend you'd better find somewhere else to go!

In my prime (almost so long ago that I can't remember it) I was a very active participant in a range of sports. In fact I was pretty good (if I say so myself) at rugby and cricket and I enjoyed the occasional game of football although to be honest I preferred to watch football but play rugby. Even today I find it frustrating to watch rugby – I'd love to be in the thick of it.

But alas, my days of sporting activities are now confined to armchair viewing and the very occasional game of golf – such is life and the onset of the aging (and weight gaining) process.

"Inter-dependence is always of greater value than independence"

People often say that art mirrors life but in many ways sport does too. Those of us in a business environment will have no doubt been exhorted to 'Think Teamwork' and have probably attended training courses where the focus has been on developing high performance teams where the acronym for **TEAM** – 'Together Everyone Achieves More' – is promoted.

The problem is of course that we are all individuals with differing gifts, abilities, personalities and ambitions. Whilst many companies want high-flying go-getters, often those type of people don't always blend in a team because they are primarily focused on achieving their own ambitions – sometimes to the detriment of corporate goals and the needs of others around them. The trick is to be able to harness the talents of individuals within a team setting where everyone benefits.

I wonder how many of us have been hurt by an ambitious and insensitive colleague whose sole aim

seems to be self promotion as they strive to get to the top no matter how many people get in their way?

The Bible talks a great deal about teamwork although it uses a number of different analogies to describe it. The Apostle Paul talks about the Church being a body with different gifts and abilities and elsewhere it is depicted as an army as well as a building of living stones built on, and dependant on, one another for strength and security.

Inter-dependence is always of greater value than independence. If we believe that inherently everyone is valuable and has something to contribute to the rest of us (which I do by the way) then we should aspire to be inclusive in our approach. Rather than always trying to compete against each other we should seek to find common ground as opposed to allowing the often minor irritations to cause us to disregard or disassociate with people.

The wisest man who ever lived – King Solomon – once said, **"The purposes of the human heart are deep waters, but those who have insight draw them out"** (Proverbs 20: 5 – TNIV). In the long run, working alongside other people, encouraging and supporting, coaching and challenging is much more productive than going it alone.

For me though the greatest example of teamwork is found in the Godhead. God the Creator Father working alongside a willing and obedient Son, Jesus, who was prepared to give up His entitlement to heaven and an all-powerful Holy Spirit whose role is to empower and guide. And they all worked together to create a means of enabling people like you and me to have a relationship with them, before we were even created.

It was, and is, a winning formula and it came at a great cost – the sacrificial death of Jesus. He was prepared to lose His life in order to win ours.

Now that's what I call winning at all costs.

If you'd like to find out more about what Christians believe, log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk where you'll find information on local Churches together with contact details, plus information on activities and other resources.