

The Last Season: A Team in Search of Its Soul

By Phil Jackson, Los Angeles Lakers coach (The Penguin Press)

Summary:

Phil Jackson recounts lessons learned from his last season of coaching the L.A. Lakers. Jackson was used to winning championships with the Chicago Bulls and the Lakers, and the 2003-2004 season looked like another sure bet. They had future Hall-of-Famers in Shaq and Kobe and added two more in Karl Malone and Gary Payton. The NBA braced itself for a record breaking season. What they got was a team that lost its way.

Jackson, known as a Zen Master of sorts, is a great leader and believes in all the right things for a high performing team like:

- Clear Goals, Roles and Responsibilities
- Good Communication
- Focus and Motivation
- Trust and Respect
- Practice, Learning and Shared Leadership

So what went wrong? Karl Malone got hurt. Kobe was on trial for rape and was tired of being Shaq's sidekick. Shaq was tired of Kobe's selfishness, and Gary Payton was simply tired. The team lost its way and lost its soul and the Zen Master couldn't get it back.

1. Goals had been set at the beginning of the season, but roles and responsibilities were never really agreed upon and as situations changed, roles were not reclarified
2. Communication and relationships broke down between Shaq and Kobe, and eventually the coach, owner and whole organization.
3. Kobe's trial was a big distraction and it infected the team, hurting its focus and its motivation
4. The Shaq and Kobe feud caused lack of trust and lack of respect, especially since the coach let it continue and
5. The team eventually didn't practice well, didn't learn and certainly didn't share leadership

BVC Opinion:

Good news: The book is well-written, easy to read, has lots of great b-ball stories, and is a great soap opera.

Bad news: It is hard to find the book's leadership and team lessons to use in the work world. I thought it would be an easier translation.

Good news: I took the time to translate the lessons for you and offer some meaningful applications. Therefore, with no offense to the Zen Master, this BVC Opinion is all you need!

Applications:

1. Set s.m.a.r.t. goals and clarify roles and responsibilities upfront. Kobe and Shaq had clear individual goals and roles but the team goals and team roles were never really accepted. Remember the "a" in s.m.a.r.t. stands for "agreed upon". And also, don't forget to make adjustments in goals and roles, and manage change along the way.
2. Pay attention to early warnings of potential communication problems. Do what you can to reduce their likelihood AND have contingency people plans too. Kobe and Shaq have different personalities, and their MBTI's (Myers Briggs Type Indicators) certainly differ. If they couldn't manage this, it was up to the coach to see it and encourage both of them to flex their behavior accordingly.

3. Choose the right people for your team based on competence AND motivation. They are both essential for success, and make up the definition Situational Leadership gives to a top (D4) performer. (See application number five for details)

4. Set a real example for your team to follow regarding respect and trust. You can't expect to get respect if you don't show it yourself. And you can't build trust by talking about it. You need to deliver on promises and do what you said you would do, all the time.

5. Use the Situational Leadership Model I have been teaching you for years! It really works! Remember it's all about different strokes for different folks, in different situations. And it's all about diagnosis and the right blend of direction and support. Once they learned the "triangle offense" and "defensive pressure", Kobe and Shaq and the rest of the team needed Phil Jackson's support. He didn't offer enough, or didn't offer it in ways the team members could appreciate and they lost their championship, lost their way and lost their soul.

And Finally:

If you have forgotten the S.L. model, the MBTI, what s.m.a.r.t. goals are, or want help on some other application I have suggested, please e-mail me at rsbvc@aol.com or call me at my office on 610-388-3680 or on my cell at 610-324-8466.