

HOW MUCH DO WE OWE ONE ANOTHER?

LEGACY LEADERS | BY KEVIN SPAFFORD

COACH LADOUCEUR does not emphasize winning. Victories are a byproduct of a larger vision. It begins with a question: 'How much do we owe one another?'—Neil Hayes in “When the Game Stands Tall”

Though not always acknowledged as such, there is no sport as uniquely American as football. It's a much faster and more physical game than our other classic, baseball. The sport's origins go back to Walter Camp in the late 19th century — from there to Knute Rockne and Pop Warner who introduced the forward pass and the rest, as they say, is history.

In the midst of another season, now may be a good time to review the longest winning streak in the game's history and distill some lessons from the leader of that endeavor. With a record of 399-25-3 over 34 seasons, there may be no greater coach in the history of football than Bob Ladouceur. If his name rings familiar, the story of De La Salle football, and the longest winning streak in the game, was chronicled in Hayes' book, “*When the Game Stands Tall*,” as well as a movie of the same name.

Hayes does an excellent job highlighting the lead-



ership skills Ladouceur used to successfully guide his teams over the long term. From the book, we learn the coach emphasizes self-responsibility to encourage team accountability. He recognizes the way a player performs in the game is a microcosm for his behaviors and attitudes in life. Ladouceur believes that in football, as in life, one can't expect a perfect outcome, but each person can apply a perfect effort.

In the book, we learn Ladouceur doesn't think of himself as just a football coach. He's a teacher, guidance counselor and shaper of young minds. This is not unlike family business owners who are, sometimes simultaneously, parent, teacher, partner and mentor.

FAMILIAL ROLES

Much of my work over the past 10 years has focused on familial roles and how they affect family business, especially related to a change in

ownership. I've often written, “The most difficult transition in the succession planning process is from parent to partner and from child to colleague.”

That said, maybe we can take a play out of the coach's book and help the next generation prepare for the responsibilities of leadership. Ladouceur says, “We can't make you great players. We can offer you the opportunity to become great players” — in other words, to create an environment where success can grow.

An environment, as the coach says, where “teams win because they care — not about winning, but about one another.”

How is your farm environment? Have you created a leadership culture that encourages action, celebrates (perfect) effort and focuses on learning experiences rather than failed attempts?

Ladouceur encourages his players to “take ownership of this game,” which applies to succession as well. He says, “You can't wish it and hope it.” Success in any endeavor “takes hard work and dedication.” So, though you work hard and you're dedicated to continuing a successful operation, that success depends on your ability to work through some

of the issues that sideline so many farm owners. No matter which generation you are, you must own the succession planning process and dedicate yourself to a plan:

Start with a family meeting. Have a constructive conversation about the future together with those who are (or want to be) involved in the operation.

Write common goals for the operation. Decide the who, what, how and when others may be involved in the operation.

Examine the obstacles that may be in the way. Families have issues, especially related to equal vs. fair, in-laws and control. Discuss them openly, and don't allow them to interfere with success.

In a true sense of putting team first and doing what's best for all, in April 2014, Ladouceur stepped down and turned the reins over to his successor. After three years of planning for transition, Ladouceur knew it was time to back away and allow the next generation to assume control.

So, how much do we owe one another and have you demonstrated your intent? **FF**

Spafford's firm handles succession planning.
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