

The Path to

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

**The 5-Step Process to
Becoming a Better Leader**

By J. Bryan Bennett



**Professional
Leadership
Academy**

The Path to Professional Leadership:
The 5-Step Process to Becoming a Better Leader

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Chapter Three - The Professional Leadership Process™

*“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”
- John Fitzgerald Kennedy*

Professional leadership is an individualized leadership process that helps a person build a leadership strategy based on their individual abilities. This process looks at leaders as individuals. It’s not a one-size-fits-all program. Everyone can’t be a great communicator. Everyone can’t be visionary. These people may have other abilities though that could make them a good leader.

The process begins with a complete assessment of the leader’s or potential leader’s personality, innate qualities and leadership abilities. Using this assessment, the program helps the leader develop their personal leadership philosophy which they must execute every day. The leader is then responsible for reflecting on how they implemented their leadership and what they could do differently next time. This information is reviewed with a coach or mentor on a regular basis to receive feedback on their performance. The leader then adjusts his or her assessment of their leadership abilities and utilizes it in the next leadership encounter. Once implemented, it creates a personalized, continually improving leadership development cycle that adjusts to almost any situation. It is the last leadership development program a person should ever need to take.

The formal Professional Leadership Process™ is comprised of five steps, which include:

1. **Assessing** Leadership Abilities – evaluating the person’s personality and individual leadership abilities.
2. Leadership **Visioning** – utilizing the abilities from the assessing step to create a personalized leadership vision or philosophy.
3. **Living** the Leadership Vision – executing and communicating the leadership vision.
4. **Reflecting** on Leadership – analyzing the leadership encounter faced and how they can be improved.
5. Leadership **Coaching & Mentoring** – reviewing the leadership encounters with a peer, superior and/or coach/mentor for advice on how to improve for the future.



Figure 17: The Professional Leadership Process™

The last two steps of the process, reflecting and coaching, is what puts the “professional” in the Professional Leadership Process™. This is the same process professional athletes have taken for decades to improve on their already exceptional skills. Before and after every sporting event, professional athletes study film and use other methods to determine how to put themselves or their team in the best position to win. You might recognize it as “reviewing game film” or “working with the swing (or any other positional) coach” or “working on the game plan.” No matter which sport you think of, that is how athletes prepare for a game, match or round. The studying doesn’t end when the sporting encounter begins. It continues sometimes during the game or match with football players reviewing offensive and defensive sets and usually continues after the game or match.



Figure 18: The Professional Steps of the Professional Leadership Process

Some athletes with well-known training regimes, include:

- Tom Brady is completely devoted to the game of football and to keeping his body in shape to play as long as he can. He has had the same personal trainer for the last 10 years who helps him continue to refine his workouts, push his physical and mental self. To Brady, this isn't work, it's a lifestyle choice. According to him, "Other than playing football, the other thing I love to do is prepare to play football." (King, 2016)
- Peyton Manning was known as an avid game film watcher. He would watch film before games to help him recognize the defensive alignments so that he could call the right plays at the scrimmage line. After the game, he reviewed game videos on the way home from road trips to see what he might have missed and to prepare for the next game.

Athletes aren't the only people who train like this. Other professions also utilize the learn, study, practice, review/feedback and implementation (SPRI) development methodology, including:

Physicians are on the top of the list not just because this is a healthcare focused book but because their training is unlike most other professions. They learn anatomy in medical school. Then they learn and practice performing various procedures under experienced physicians until they can successfully perform them on their own. But their training doesn't end there. Throughout their professional career, they are required to keep their

knowledge current through continuing medical education and learning new procedures, depending on their specialty.

Musicians & Singers continue to work at their craft even after they become accomplished. They create songs, test them out with group members or in front of live audiences and revise them until they achieve the sound or delivery they desire.

Artists make multiple versions of their paintings or sculptures. What is seen on display in the museum or art gallery is usually just the final product. Seldom does the public see all the previous iterations the artist completed before they achieved what they had conceived in their head.

Professors continue to work at their classes. This is especially true when they are writing a new class or teaching a class written by another course writer for the first time. It takes a couple of times teaching the class before the professor believes the class clearly communicates the materials and the course expectations.

Many amateur athletes train in a similar manner, but most exercise very little power over their situation. When you compare an amateur/collegiate football or basketball player to a professional player, you will find that the professionals sometimes make many times more than their coaches or even team executives. Consequently, they exert a great deal more power over the relationship, even to the extent of getting the coach fired because they didn't get along or didn't want to play for them. The Professional Leadership Process™ is adaptable to scenarios when the followers can potentially exert undue influence or when the

environment is very complex, thus it is called “professional” for this reason.

If athletes who are the top 1% of the top 1% can continue to develop their already exceptional skills, then why can't leaders. It's not about the number of leadership courses or workshops a person takes, but about finding something that works for the person and sticking to it. The key is adaptability to a given situation. If it's not adaptable, it won't be sustainable. If you take nothing else from this book, implementing the **Reflection** and **Coaching/Mentoring** steps will serve you well in the long run.

*“I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career.
I’ve lost almost 300 games.
Twenty-six times I’ve been trusted to take
the game winning shot and missed.
I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life.
And that is why I succeed.”*
- Michael Jordan

Tales from the Leadership Front – Sports as a Metaphor

While developing the early iterations of the leadership process, I realized how similar a personalized leadership development process was to how athletes train. The coach assesses the athlete's personal strengths and weaknesses and prescribes a training regimen that improves their strengths and compensates for their weaknesses. Additionally, their training is usually specialized for the position, opponent or environment they would be performing in. A quarterback in football does not receive the same training as a wide receiver. A first baseman in baseball does not

train the same way a catcher does. A center in basketball doesn't receive the same training as a guard. The same holds true for individual sports in which the athlete's training is based on their potential opponents, conditions, track, course or court they may be performing on.

Athletics is also useful because there is a clear distinction between amateur and professional athletes. Sometimes these lines may blur, but typically, the amateur athlete is not financially compensated for their efforts while a professional athlete does. At the professional level, these athletes can exert significant influence over the team, game or match because there is a limited number of athletes that can perform at that level. At any given time during the season, each sport has a defined total number of roster spots in the league, including:

- National Football League with 1,700 players
- Major League Baseball with 1,300 players
- National Hockey League with 700 players
- National Basketball Association with 500 players

This doesn't include the number of ranked golfers or tennis players of which only the top 200 or so actually make a reasonable living. (Morales, 2013) Keep in mind that these are the top athletes in the world. Not just the United States. If the best athletes in the world receives ongoing personalized training and coaching, then shouldn't leaders who face more challenging situations and have a greater impact on the world.

I believe sports are not just a metaphor about life but are also a great metaphor for leadership. We've already discussed the similarities in the training process, but sports also teaches:

- Responsibility - understanding a person's role on the team
- Teamwork - working with everyone on the team, not just the people he or she likes
- Commitment – ongoing preparation and continual improvement
- Humility – accepting defeat since no one is successful 100% of the time
- Self-discipline - learning to focus on what is most important

After reading this, I hope you will view leadership and sports in an entirely different light.