

Allow Many Stars to Shine to Create a Winning Team

It is no secret that I root for the Black & Gold. It kind of comes with the territory of being a Pittsburgher—although thankfully, the love for this team and city spans beyond geographic boundaries (and the Steelers’ current win-loss record, LOL). After all, many people are like me: transplants who fell in love with the city and its ethos, and who support The Burgh and its teams through good times and bad.

I’m a behavioral scientist by training, and an executive advisor and consultant by profession. For over 30 years I have had the gift of helping seniormost leaders create cultures that drive winning performance. And as a faithful sports fan, I have watched the Steelers and other teams with an eye toward management capabilities and decisions, teamwork, talent recruitment and development, etc. I guess it’s my jam.

In ’22, the hot topics of the Steelers have been who is playing at QB and the lackluster offense to start the season. But I was struck by a quote I read recently from Steeler’s star running back Najee Harris. He shared how Coach Tomlin encourages the players and community to “*show steely resolve and smile in the face of adversity.*” In contrast, Najee shares how unhelpful media outlets are being, and how they are making that steely resolve unnecessarily harder:

“You are the guys breaking us apart. You keep asking questions to put people in categories and



divide us one against another. We’re at a point where we are building. We’re working on it. But you guys come in here and ask questions of all the receivers and Mitch (QB) about what’s not working. That’s not how you build, that’s not how you get better. You guys are breaking us all up, and we need to just stay together, come together as a team and focus on what matters most.”

In my succession work, I often see the same pattern . . . the felt need to disparage someone to lift up another. Instead of ranking individuals, we should focus on combining and developing individual talents to strengthen the entire team. Teams win when the synergies are so strong among A-players that nothing can penetrate them: $1+1+1 = 5$.

I have a favorite definition of teamwork: “*Never allowing another member to fail . . . actively caring enough to cover, intervene, prevent when you see something going awry—then debrief and coach with honesty and unwavering support to prevent recurrence and continue getting better.*” Teammates and colleagues who demonstrate such teamwork, and support one another unwaveringly, are the ones who succeed and shine. We need to ensure that—corporately—we are enabling/encouraging this cycle to occur and are doing our part to create winning teams.

For the first 25 years of my career, Dr. Julie Smith was my business partner. We were and are equals—both strong, hard-working women with big dreams and ambitions, around the same age with the same academic degrees, and we were co-leading the company—yet, people seemed to want there to be a #1 and a #2 leading the firm—not two #1s. People often seemed taken aback when I would declare myself Julie’s biggest fan, her #1 admirer, and mean it.

I am still quick to name areas where Julie is so much better than me. We didn’t always agree. While we had common values, our strengths were different. At times, people would try and get me to side against Julie . . . as if somehow doing so would elevate my status. I never took the bait. Nor did she. Julie made me better through coaching that I sometimes really didn’t want to hear. She coached me to do new things. And she is still among the first people to praise me/my work.

Our company benefited immeasurably from the two #1s that co-served an organization we each loved deeply. Most companies I work with strive to

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work their best, but they could do even better if they were not encouraged to compete internally.

As executives, professionals, coaches, board members, and those who advise high performers, we need to always remind ourselves and others that *the whole must be more than just the sum of the individual parts*. We must understand that, considering our role in creating such synergies, we need to encourage all to be their greatest selves. Football, business, families . . . these are not individual sports. They are all team

sports that require everyone to work together to be their best.

Are you doing your part to enable many stars to shine in your organization?

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Dr. Leslie Braksick—executive, entrepreneur, CEO coach, board member, and author—co-leads MyNextSeason to support companies and individuals during important transitions across the career continuum—and ensure they happen well.

MyNextSeason provides companies and individuals with support in navigating strategic career transitions such as succession, retirements, and development of high-potential leaders. Transitions need to happen exceedingly well for individuals to realize their purpose and potential, and to ensure company cultures and reputations are enhanced through strategic talent management.