Tem Innovation: Lessons from the 1980 USA’s Olympic Men’s Hockey Team

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Background

- The greatest sporting upset ever-US hockey team defeats the Soviets
- In 1980, Professionals did not play for the USA (no NHL players)
- Soviet Union was the best team in the world. A team of professionals who had won 42 consecutive games, including a recent 6-0 victory over the NHL All-Stars
- Soviet Union won the Gold in 1964, 1968, 1972, 1976, and were heavy favorites in 1980
- Coach Herb Brooks just won the US NCAA championship for Univ of Minn (Craig Patrick was his asst)
World Events

- President Carter was in office
- US economy was struggling
- Gas had gone up to $1.19 a gallon
- Soviets had just invaded Afghanistan
- Strong anti-Soviet sentiment
- Fax Machines appeared in Japan
- PacMan #1 video game
- Dallas top TV show

from potential to performance
Business Take-a-ways

- The importance of staff selection
- A team working as 1 will defeat group of individuals (1 team, 1 goal)
- Power of positive thinking
- Innovation comes from doing things differently
- Successful leadership teams have different styles
- Trust is essential
Interview of Herb Brooks by US Olympic Advisory Committee

• 1960 US Hockey Team Player – Brooks was last player cut one week before the medal games, in which US won the Gold.
• Brooks emphasis that the US needs an Innovative approach
Picking the Top 26

- Empowering others to make decisions
- Having the courage to follow your “gut”
- Importance of “right fit” over skill (B.E.S.T. Staffing profile)
Battle with the US Olympic Advisory Committee

• Coach Herb Brooks bucking the trend on team selection
• Disruptive Innovation
“I’m Not Your Friend”

- Top 26 are announced
- Respect – not “friendship” is goal
- Leadership partnership – someone needs to be the empathetic voice
Frank and Open Communication

• To Determine “fit” coach Brooks had given each player an assessment test
• Assistant Coach does not trust yet
• Ability to speak openly and frankly with one another
Leadership on steroids

- US had just finished scrimmaging a weak Norway team to a 3-3 tie in Norway (and they were happy with the Tie)
- Players weren’t focused during the game (i.e., players were looking at girls in the stands)
- Coach Brooks pushes the team to the brink
- Assistant Coaches had the courage to stop it
The Super Power – the Soviet Union

• 42 games, 42 victories
• Just beat the NHL All-stars 6-0
• US Hockey team does not trust they can beat them
• Brooks focuses on positive thinking and preparation and creativity (NHL is the architect of present – they won’t change)
“We’re a Family”

- Brooks adds a player 6 months after the team’s been practicing
- They already know that one person is going to be cut to bring the team from 21 to 20 players, and they don’t want 2 of their “family” to get cut.
Softening of Coach

- Importance of a social occasion as teambuilding event
- Note the shift in Coach Brooks and from the players
Leadership is making tough decisions

- Team has to get down to 20 players (Olympic Rules)
- Empathetic Coach Brooks
David scrimmages Goliath

- Team USA loses a scrimmage against the Soviets 10-3
- US Olympian Jack O’Callahan is injured-pressure from US Hockey Association to replace him
Leading with head and heart

- Coach’s decision on Jack O’Callahan’s injury status
Let The Games Begin
Games #1 and 2

• Preliminary Round
• Game #1
  – Sweden – considered the 3rd best team in world
  – US is losing 2-1 with less than one minute left
  – If they don’t at least tie, they don’t get to Medal Round
• Game #2
  – Czechoslovakia - considered 2nd best team in world
  – US wins 7-3
  – USA starts to believe and trust
Games # 3, 4, and 5

• Game #3
  – Norway - US wins 5-1
  – Note how media is not allowed to talk to ‘star’ players

• Game #4
  – Romania – US wins 7-3

• Game #5
  – West Germany – US wins 4-2
• “This is Your Time” – Brooks pre-game speech

• Tonight ‘you’re the greatest hockey team in the world’
• Opening Face-off
• Al Michaels and Ken Dryden (real announcers)
• Reality Distortion – believing what you shouldn’t be able to believe
• US falls behind 2-1 with almost no time left after the first period

• Note the excitement with US, negative energy with Soviets
• Entering last period losing 3-2
• Coach Brooks starts to believe – then gets players to believe
• Neuro scientists agree that positive energy leads to positive results
• US Ties the game in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} period with just 4 seconds left in penalty
• Players begin to believe
• The power of momentum and focusing on the positive
• It is about B and T (Behaviors and Traits)
• Note who scores the goal to give the US the lead
Do You Believe in Miracles?

Al Michaels, ABC
Why Did This Miracle Happen?
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IF YOU BELIEVE.
ANYTHING
CAN HAPPEN.
Thank You

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