

TITLE: Identifying and Analyzing the Practices Utilized by Coaches in Achieving Their "Personal Best" in Coaching

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OBJECTIVE: To learn more about coaches as leaders and to discover the leadership practices of head football coaches when they achieve their personal best leadership experience.

METHODOLOGY: One hundred and ninety-five NCAA Division I head football coaches were asked by mail to complete a 47 open-item survey regarding their personal best leadership experience as a coach. The "Personal Best Leadership Experience" was modified from the leadership framework and methodology of Kouzes and Posner (1987). Of the twenty-seven (14%) who responded, the majority had been head coach one to five years at their present school; fifteen had been an assistant coach for over ten years. Sixteen were Division I-A coaches and eleven were Division I-AA coaches. All responses were content analyzed by the researcher, based upon a coding scheme formed after reviewing the first several returns.

KEY FINDINGS: Common practices were evident. Ninety-three percent (N = 25) of the coaches' personal best leadership experiences involved Challenging the Process or changing the existing ways of doing things. The need to have a vision and then communicate it (Inspiring a Shared Vision) was mentioned by 22 of the coaches (81%). Involving others, empowering assistant coaches and "anyone else they can involve in the program" was part of the personal best experience of 20 coaches (74%). Modeling the Way, in the form of leading by example and guiding one's actions by values, was expressed by all (100%) of the coaches. Finally, 78 percent (N = 21) felt the need to recognize achievement and celebrate accomplishments (Encouraging the Heart).

Closer examination of the responses suggested that "communicating the vision and inspiring others to that vision were vitally important for coaches while they achieved their personal best" (32). Russell concludes: "...a competitive edge may be gained by successfully communicating the vision and inspiring others" (32).