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All leaders are challenged at times when a plan veers off track. It happens sometimes because no one can truly predict future events and conditions. If they could, they need to contact me now so I can place my winning superfecta bet for the Kentucky Derby.

As a leader, you must devise and communicate your game plan to your team on a constant basis. You must plan for various scenarios as well as for the development of people and teams to capably deal with those scenarios. At some point in time, though, a team will become disjointed--some individuals will lose focus--others start slipping and sliding all over the place. It may become necessary for a time-out--a time when the team needs to huddle up.

When a team huddles up, it recalls the game plan and how it is to be implemented. When team players don't take time to huddle, the results can be disastrous--or even comical. I've made that mistake many times during my role as a leader. Occasionally, I let people go for too long, assuming they would figure things out on their own and accomplish the objective. It often turned into a total mess--to the point we literally had to start over from scratch. Our efforts and results would resemble the following story:

A gentleman was walking down a residential street when he noticed a man struggling with a washing machine at the doorway of his house. When he

volunteered to help, the homeowner was overjoyed, and the two men together began to work and struggle with the bulky appliance. After several minutes of fruitless effort, the two stopped and just looked at each other. They were on the verge of total exhaustion. Finally, when they caught their breath, the first man said to the homeowner: “We’ll never get this washing machine in there!” To which the homeowner replied: “In? I’m trying to move it out!”

These two men failed to huddle up and discuss the plan. Things should never be too busy or urgent to not create a moment to huddle up. Here are five things that a huddle provides:

1) *Focus.* No matter how often or well a leader communicates the plan, it never hurts to use huddle time to get people to refocus on what's important. In basketball, successful coaches take time-outs to huddle the players, especially when the opposing team is causing them to get out of their game plan. When they huddle, they go over the fundamentals to get back on track.

2) *An opportunity to listen.* When the team gets together, everyone involved has a chance to exchange information. Communication must flow both ways. When the leader is receiving the right information, it helps him or her to send out the right information. New information can also prompt a leader to make adjustments.

3) *An opportunity to make personnel changes.* Sometimes the adjustments leaders need to make are changes in

personnel or their responsibilities. Often the best way to solve a problem is to allow a different person to tackle it. A good leader can see that and is willing to make a change.

4) *An opportunity to change strategies.* If people are doing fine in their roles, then maybe a different strategy will work better. In basketball, this is when the coach, after a time-out and huddle, decides to keep the same players on the floor but runs different plays or changes the posture of the defense.

5) *An opportunity to rest.* Sometimes people just need an opportunity to stop, take a breather, and regroup. A well-timed huddle can help the team revitalize so they can carry on and succeed.

Never underestimate the importance of a huddle. Even the great Buffalo Bills offense of the 1990s, which became known as the K-Gun under the leadership of Hall of Fame quarterback Jim Kelly, had to huddle up occasionally even though the Bills' no-huddle offense was moving down the field like an unstoppable locomotive. Kelly acknowledged that even when things were firing on all cylinders, he'd still occasionally huddle up the offense and say, “Good job! Everyone doing okay?”

There is never really a bad time to huddle up (unless the building is burning down or the tsunami is in sight). Keeping your team focused and on track will enable you to successfully accomplish short- and long-term objectives.

~ The End ~