



Overcoaching and the Romance of Leadership

Excerpts from Jim Thomson's book, *The Double-Goal Coach*. Permission granted by Jim Thompson. www.positivecoach.org

"Leaders tend to feel that if they are not doing something dramatic-actively managing something- they are not adding value. Stanford Business School professor Jeff Pfeffer introduced me to the phenomenon in the business world known as the "Romance of Leadership". Leaders are supposed to be decisive and active, or so we are told over and over again. And it feels good to wield power, so we tend to do it even when it might profit us to let others take the lead. It is often true that people think we are doing a better job if they see us being "hands -on". Finally, we tend to give ourselves higher marks as leaders if we are highly involved and making things happen.

The temptation to succumb to the Romance of Leadership by overcoaching is heightened by the media covering professional and major college sports. Color commentators are often former overcoaching coaches who tend to focus their attention on coaches who coach the way they did. It is more engaging to watch a coach on television who is pacing the floor and yelling plays than a coach who is sitting quietly on the bench.

The Romance of Leadership can lead a coach down the garden path. The truth is that many coaches overcoach during games. Sometimes the best thing you can do during games is to get out of the way.

I once heard of a coach who called time-out near the end of a close basketball game, and then said almost nothing in the team huddle. After his team went on to win the game, he was asked why he called time-out if he did not have instructions for his players. He said he noticed the opposing coach getting more and more upset with his players. He called time-out to give the other coach a chance to blow up and drain the Emotional Tanks of his players, which the opposing coach promptly did. The coach and team that took the time out ended up winning the game by giving the opposing coach a chance to overcoach. "

I can personally attest to similar examples from hockey. My favorite story is from bantam hockey when we were playing our chief rival from the neighboring community. We had a very strong team that year and at the end of the second period we lead 5-1. During the break between the second and third period we sat quietly in our locker room and listened to the opposing coach in the next locker room tear down his team, insult his top players, throw garbage cans against the wall and implore them to play harder. In our locker room I never said a word until it was time to return to the ice for the third period and all I said was, "boys are you ready?" We scored 5 more goals in the next ten minutes as our opponents had been completely destroyed by their well meaning but misguided coach. Other examples are coaches who are constantly changing one player after a quick whistle following a face off and those coaches who are trying to micro manage every detail of the game action by yelling instructions non stop to the players on the ice.

Overcaoching during games is a big problem and does not help the players. Relax and enjoy the game.

Hal Tearse
Coach in Chief, Minnesota Hockey
September, 2008