



Keep Your Eyes on the Ball! But Which Ball?

Throughout my career, I have been part of diverse global leaderships teams and held various positions of responsibility. Many years ago, one of our business leaders, who was responsible for the unit, frequently advised us to “keep our eyes on the ball!” During almost every monthly financial call, and at the end of every call, he repeated these words. “Don’t forget to keep your eyes on the ball!” Nobody thought to question him about what he really meant.

At the time, my assignment involved building a new global product line that would be managed in multiple locations. My participation in helping to launch this business successfully was critical for my career; I had to prove that not only could I do it, but also that I could do it with sustainable results. All I had on hand to initiate the project was a very good brand and, of course, an approved strategic decision supported by the global leadership to invest in this new business. From my perspective, “keeping my eyes on the ball” simply meant that I had to ensure that the business generated revenues and profits within the established timelines – or, my position and reputation would be in jeopardy.

Hearing our global business leader repeating his phrase, mostly on the financial calls, I assume, looking back, that we all implicitly thought he was referring to the financial metrics and results that he expected.

A Conversation and Good Advice

After a few other calls, I believed there had to be more to what he was saying. Knowing how critical the project was to my career and the company’s bottom line, I had to be certain that I knew what he expected from me. So, I asked, “What do you really mean by ‘keep your eyes on the ball’? Financial results?” To that, he replied, “Listen Ali, what do you think is the most important ingredient of a successful business?” My immediate response was, “revenue growth and profitability.” To which he responded, “Wrong. Revenue and profitability is the cause of something else.”

Considering the scale of our client base at the time, whatever we introduced in the market would enable us to sell a few new products to generate some revenue. With that in mind, I tried again: “Well, what about scale?” He replied in the negative, adding, “The people whom you

The people whom
you select to work
with is the most
important
ingredient of any
successful and
sustainable business.



select to work with is the most important ingredient of any successful and sustainable business. You need to keep your eyes on your people all the time. The moment you stop doing that, you will start losing.” He also offered this advice:

- Keep an eye on the people you hire.
- Keep an eye on the people you trust to give accountability to lead.
- Keep an eye on the people you promote.
- Keep an eye on the people you select to fill critical positions.
- Keep an eye on the people who behave wrongly to others.
- Keep an eye on the people whom you develop and prepare to grow the business for the future.

And finally, “As long as you do these things, you will not have to worry about anything else. Trust me!”

The Right Focus

Being young and naïve at the time, his advice prompted a mind-shift for me. Ever since, the only thing I focus on in a business is on people. Plain and simple.

After a few years working together, we all moved on to new roles. While he held several CEO and management board roles in very successful companies, we kept in contact as we enjoyed each other’s company. And every time, I heard this phrase spoken in a business setting, I remembered him and thought about how so many people misunderstood this phrase.

Nearly 15 years later, I had the pleasure to spend another weekend with him, along with other former friends/colleagues. During one conversation, I said to him, “Remember how you told us to keep an eye on the ball? I did that throughout most of my career, and it helped me to achieve whatever I set up in my mind. But, unfortunately, I witnessed the opposite practice by many leaders.



To use another analogy, they kept their eyes only on the cake, not on the people who were baking the cake. Those leaders were only interested in getting a piece of the cake. What do you think about that?"

He looked at me with great surprise and said, "I guess there will always be very hungry people on this planet who eat more than their share – and people do need to eat. But you know that very successful businesses are only built by people who engender trust with their clients as well as their own people. If you lose sight of this point, you are in trouble. Stick with building trust. And don't forget that "people" means clients, your colleagues, and your employees. So, my friend, continue to keep your eyes on the ball – keep your eyes on the people!"

About the Author: Ali Kursun is a Senior Consultant at sparkChief & Co., a consulting firm that helps organisations to engage, develop and retain the right people to grow their business.

Copyright © 2018 sparkChief & Co.



EMPOWERING BUSINESS LEADERS THROUGH
THE POWER OF NEW THINKING.

sparkChief & Co.

25 Route de Lullier
1254 Jussy, GE, Switzerland

Tel +41 22 346 24 05
inquire@sparkchief.com
www.sparkchief.com

Copyright © 2018 sparkChief & Co.