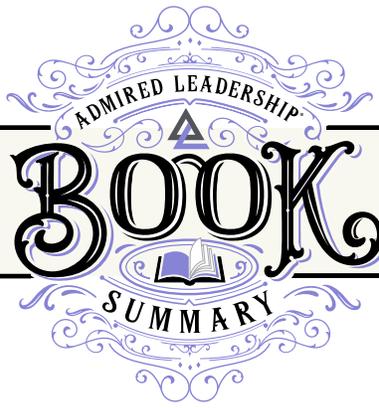




Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



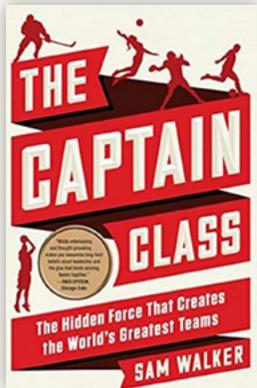
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The Captain Class

A New Theory of Leadership

Published 2017

BOOK AUTHOR: SAM WALKER



After objectively identifying the world's most accomplished teams in sports history, Sam Walker, the founding editor of *The Wall Street Journal's* sports section, proposed a lofty theory about the driving force behind a team's ability to achieve and sustain historic greatness. He identified the character of the leader - the team's captain - as the singular ingredient in the world's greatest teams.

Seen by many as a ceremonial position, Walker reaffirms the importance of the captain and rebukes assumptions that challenge it. Overshadowed by heavily endorsed celebrities and "GOAT" (Greatest of All Time) athletes, effective captains may receive less notice, but they greatly impact team performance with unconventional interpersonal skills. Interviews, historical records, and scientific studies are cited to support his claims, formula, and classification of these captains. Readers are reminded that leaders of all kinds can embody exceptionalism and implement unexpected approaches to make a team, company, society, or civilization work.

Key Quote

"Though [*The Captain Class*] uses sports as its source material, it's ultimately a book about a single idea - one that is simple, powerful, and can be applied to teams in many other fields, from business and politics to science and the arts. It's the notion that the most crucial ingredient in a team that achieves and sustains historic greatness is the character of the player who leads it" (p. xvii).

— Sam Walker

Key Concepts

Alpha Lions: Identifying the World's Greatest Teams. Using a comprehensive, detailed criteria to evaluate sports teams in history around the world, 17 "Tier One" teams stand out.

Captain Theory: The Importance of Glue Guys. The men and women who led the seventeen Tier One teams were not traditional leaders. They did not have the type of profile we'd expect a superior leader to have.

Talent, Money, and Culture: Alternative Explanations. The most successful teams in sports history did not necessarily have "enlightened management or more financial resources" or even superior talent (p. 68).

Do Coaches Matter? The Vince Lombardi Effect. On Tier One teams, the coach is not the main reason for a team's success, and great coaches for Tier One teams had a partnership with a player who worked as a "proxy on the field" (p. 86).

The Opposite Direction: Leadership Mistakes and Misperceptions. Wrong assumptions held by sports fans and business leaders about sports leaders are damaging the ability to build winning teams.

False Idols: Flawed Captains and Why We Love Them. Unlike many celebrated but flawed team leaders, Tier One captains do not operate at a "fiery temperature," and they are not motivated by angst.

The Captaincy in Winter: Leadership's Decline, and How to Revive It. "Great leaders do not need to be glamorous. They only need a knowledge of what a successful effort looks like and a plan to get there. They do not need to remind people how great they are" (p. 270).

Epilogue. The author tells the story in detail of one event in the life of Jason Varitek of the Boston Red Sox - a captain who completely changed the momentum of an important game.

ORIGINS OF ELITE TEAMS

Sam Walker combed through historical records of professional and international sports leagues, associations, confederations, and annual tournaments and developed a formula to distinguish the most accomplished dynasties. He calls these teams "Tier One" teams. His terminology, criteria, rules, and the results of his study are highlighted below and laid out on pages 15-30.

He used three criteria to qualify a group of athletes as a team. The team has "five or more members," "its members interact with the opponent," and "its members work together" (pp. 15-16).

Additionally, he used three rules for a team to have been considered an exceedingly credentialed team. "The team played a major sport," "it played in the world's top competition," and "its dominance stretched over many years" (pp. 17-18).

To be considered a Tier One team, it had to meet two claims. The first claim was that "It had sufficient opportunity to prove itself" (p. 23). Secondly, its record had to stand alone (p. 24).



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TIER ONE TEAMS

As a result of Walker's criteria, 17 teams qualified for Tier One world's greatest teams (pp. 27-30)

- **The Collingwood Magpies**, Australian rules football (1927-30)
- **The New York Yankees**, Major League Baseball (1949-53)
- **Hungary**, international men's soccer (1950-55)
- **The Montreal Canadiens**, National Hockey League (1955-60)
- **The Boston Celtics**, National Basketball Association (1956-69)
- **Brazil**, international men's soccer (1958-62)
- **The Pittsburgh Steelers**, National Football League (1974-80)
- **The Soviet Union**, international men's ice hockey (1980-84)
- **The New Zealand All Blacks**, International Rugby Union (1986-90)
- **Cuba**, international women's volleyball (1991-2000)
- **Australia**, international women's field hockey (1993-2000)
- **The United States**, international women's soccer (1996-99)
- **The San Antonio Spurs**, National Basketball Association (1997-2016)
- **The New England Patriots**, National Football League (2001-18)
- **Barcelona**, professional soccer (2008-13)
- **France**, international men's handball (2008-15)
- **The New Zealand All Blacks**, International Rugby Union (2011-15)

The captains of the 17 Tier One teams, known as the "Glue Guys", did not match the expected profiles of a superior leader. Tier One captains had the following unexpected traits:

1. "They lacked superstar talent.
2. They weren't fond of the spotlight.
3. They didn't 'lead' in the traditional sense.
4. They weren't angels.
5. They did potentially divisive things.
6. They weren't the usual suspects.
7. No one had mentioned this theory [that the captain was the driving force].
8. The captain [wasn't] the primary leader" (pp. 48-49).

FIVE THEORIES NOT ALWAYS ASSOCIATED WITH TIER ONE GREATNESS

Theory One: "It takes a GOAT." In all but three cases, "the most dominant teams in history had hierarchies in which the leader of the players was not the go-to superstar" (pp. 52-57).

Theory Two: "It's a matter of overall talent." Of course, winning teams need a group of skilled players with balanced strengths, but in Walker's analysis, a "talent cluster" is not always needed for what Walker dubs as "freakish success" (pp. 57-61).



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Theory Three: “It’s the money, stupid.” “When it came to freakish success, lavish spending seemed to have little to do with it” (pp. 61-64).

Theory Four: “It’s a question of management.” In the case of the New Zealand All Blacks (represented two times on the Tier One list), management did far from elevate the All Blacks, so “its winning culture must have had another source” (pp. 64-67).

Theory Five: “It’s the coach.” “To bring a team to the top, coaching only goes so far” (p. 85). Coaches - often not always well-known or lauded - on Tier One teams achieved their greatest success when they had a player serving as their proxy on the field (pp. 67-86).

CAPTAIN PROFILES

Stories of leaders like Tim Duncan, Yogi Berra, Carlos Puyol, Carla Overbeck, Jack Lambert, Maurice “Rocket” Richard, and more showed that Tier One captains all shared the following traits (listed below and on page 91). The seven traits of Tier One captains include:

1. They Just Keep Coming: Doggedness and Its Ancillary Benefits. “Captains of the greatest teams in sports have had an unflagging commitment to playing at their maximum capability” (p. 111). This also included a commitment to conditioning and preparation for the end goal of ensuring a victory.

2. Intelligent Fouls: Playing to the Edge of the Rules. Tier One captains stretch the rules at times in order to win. In times of high pressure, captains were able to intentionally bend or push rules (without the intent to do harm) in pursuit of a worthwhile goal. The captain did not care how he was perceived by the outside world and remained entirely focused on the internal dynamics of his team (pp. 90, 132).

3. Carrying Water: The Invisible Art of Leading From the Back. Tier One captains didn’t hesitate to lead from behind in a service role rather than as a spectacular superstar. Leaders embodied the hidden art of leading from the back. “They gravitated to functional roles” and were less concerned about their own performance. The great captains “lowered themselves in relation to the group whenever possible in order to earn the moral authority to drive them forward in tough moments.” This shows us that the best way to lead is to serve (p. 153).

4. Boxing Ears and Wiping Noses: Practical Communication. Tier One captains facilitated democratic and frequent verbal and nonverbal communication with the entire team. Elite captains are not motivational speakers, cathartic orators, or necessarily articulate people, but they are consistently vocal. There is great value in “quiet, unglamorous, team-oriented, and workmanlike captains” that listen as much as they talk (p. 260). When they talk, leaders do so democratically, encouraging each person to take a turn. Successful leaders circulate widely and talk to everyone with enthusiasm and energy. The secret to effective team communication isn’t grandiosity, instead, leaders foster “a stream of chatter that is practical, physical, and consistent” (p. 170).



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5. Calculated Acts: The Power of Nonverbal Displays. Tier One captains intentionally used nonverbal communication, which served as a powerful tool for making connections. Leading by calculated acts, eye contact, or pregame rituals, they propel a team to “run faster, jump higher, hit harder, and push through pain and exhaustion.” Tier One captains are masters of the art of automatically connecting with the brainpower of people around them (p. 183).

6. Uncomfortable Truths: The Courage to Stand Apart. Tier One captains were not driven by ego, but they also did not shy away from conflict around the goal being pursued. Tier One captains do not hesitate to speak truth to those in power, like the team coach or owner. Even if it is uncomfortable to approach those in power, they do it because they know it will help the team play better together. They avoid groupthink and must operate “at the margins of what members presently like and want rather than at the center of the collective consensus” (p. 198). When conflict labeled as a “personality clash” occurs (the focus is on personal conflict), studies show “significant decreases in trust, cohesion, satisfaction, and commitment” with a negative impact on teamwork. However, “task conflict” (arguing about the job at hand) has a basically neutral effect on performance (p. 200).

7. The Kill Switch: Regulating Emotion. Tier One captains regulated their emotions and, even when faced with setbacks, they were able to excel. Leaders handle outstanding circumstances like injury, political or team strife, or a personal tragedy with selfless emotional strength. This has a profound impact on a team in a decisive moment. While emotion can drive a team, it also can disable it. Elite captains always serve the interest of the team.

Emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills are exemplified by elite captains who are tasked with motivating, challenging, protecting, and inspiring teammates. These leaders have high emotional fluency and understand how to use “‘emotional information’ to change their thinking and behavior.” This helps teams “perform better in settings where they have to interact with others.” “Emotional intelligence is closely correlated to the skills required to be an effective leader and can be more significant in this regard than IQ or even a person’s technical expertise” (pp. 163-164).

As an example of a Tier One captain, Carlos Alberto Torres, the last living captain to raise the World Cup during soccer’s golden age in Brazil, explains that Brazil is a culture that does not have “a uniform way of thinking, and there is less formal education. There are some very poor kids who only go to school for a couple of years before they start playing - and the captain has to know that. We need a leader who is a guide for many, many things; someone who can help them. So being captain in Brazil tests the deepest nature of your personality. You have to try to understand people, to know their backgrounds” (p. 151).

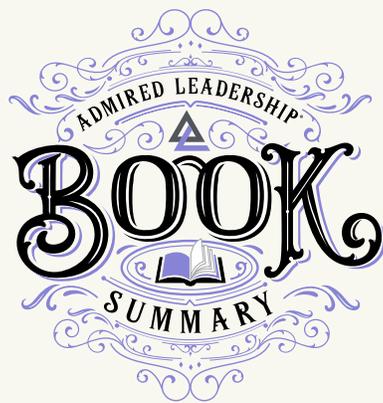


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Note from the author: “As a writer, the best analogy I can think of is that captains are like the verb in a sentence. The verb may not be as memorable as the nouns, as evocative as the adjectives, or as expressive as the punctuation. But the verb is the force that does the yeoman’s work - unifying the disparate parts and creating the forward momentum” (p. 265).

Walker, S. (2017). *The Captain Class*. New York: Random House. Kindle Edition.



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The Latest and Greatest Books for Leaders

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