

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

7 Insights from a Gutsy
Leader on how to Shape
Culture and Coach People
to Want to Improve

Want to be privy to a private conversation? What follows are 7 Insights from a Gutsy Leader on how to Shape Culture and Coach People to Want to Improve.

Listen in as one of the greatest managers—ever — sets the tone for his team at Spring Training inside their clubhouse, a place few outsiders ever get to go!

Bruce Bochy has always been very intentional about shaping culture and creating the conditions for chemistry to flourish. He knows he can't legislate chemistry, but he can influence it. For Bochy, this starts in the off-season as he prepares for his opening talk to the players at Spring Training.



“For me, it’s all about setting the tone and bringing focus to our camp,” Bochy told us. “I try to challenge our players to think about how they think. I want them to think about how they approach physical conditioning. I want them to be persistent about honing the fundamentals, because in this part of our game, you never arrive. And, I want them to be intentional about mental conditioning and establishing the right mindset.”

Bochy told his players that he didn’t want to spend a lot of time on last year’s dismal season, but he wanted to reflect on it enough to “learn from our failures.” Here are 7 insights he shared with his players to kick start Spring Training:

1. Feed and Further our Culture

Bochy said he wanted to rekindle the culture the Giants had in the championship years. He didn’t think his boys had completely gotten away from it, but he believes culture is something you have to feed every day. “Our culture didn’t quite have the edge it had in years past. It was a little flat,” he told the players. Comparing the Giants winning seasons to 2017, he observed, “Last year we weren’t having as much fun in the clubhouse. We weren’t talking baseball. We were not connecting. We just didn’t have that good vibe. It wasn’t bad, it just wasn’t what it had been.”

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Bruce Bochy

What was missing?

A gut-level drive and determination to win now, not tomorrow or in the next series. A willingness to get pissed off when things weren't going well. Boch told the team they needed to do a better job of holding each other accountable, calling each other out when needed, celebrating small wins, and helping each other stay "in the moment" when intense focus was necessary. What could your culture use more or less of? Rally your team to feed and further the good, together. Get solutions-oriented and find ways to move on from the things holding them back, whether they're old ideas, bad habits, the status quo, or toxic behaviors, challenge them to do and change together!

2. Conditioning is a Gift to the Team

There were a number of things that Boch and the team could NOT control last year. One of them was injuries. So, he asked the players to focus on what they could control— conditioning, being on top of their game. Bruce has always believed that conditioning is a gift you give to your teammates. Conditioning is a prerequisite to being more athletic, improving defense and gaining more pop at the plate, all of which the Giants hope to achieve this year. If you're in shape, you are less prone to injuries. If you are physically tough, you have more grit, more determination. You gut it out when others give in.

This is true even if you are not a professional athlete. When you are in shape, you are well, and you've drilled the fundamentals of the job over and over again (because you have the mental and physical stamina), the fundamentals then become second nature. Then, you're more willing and able to be creative, take risks and improvise. This raises the tide for everyone.

3. Chemistry is Not Automatic, it's Never Final

Rather than just letting it evolve and NOT really thinking about it, Boch asked his players to be intentional about creating and fueling the team's chemistry, the vibe in the club house, the vibe in your department, and /or the vibe in your business. He told them they have to step up and take ownership of the clubhouse. Why? Because the environment you come to work in everyday can drag you down or draw you up. He would do his part, as would the other coaches, but it's also a players clubhouse. Managers must do their part but culture is also as much the will of the people as it is the will of the managers. What managers and employees collectively and consistently put into it, is what it will become.

Boch, noted that last year it was like the players were in their own little world instead of each other's world. Boch recognizes the need for personal time for families and friends—and themselves, he wants them to be able to decompress privately, if and when needed. But he also knows that what has made the Giants bond in years past is the time players invested in each other processing wins and losses alike, never shaming or blaming, but instead reframing a game or a play to learn from it. Does your culture shame, blame? Or have you built a culture where



team members are committed to reframing in the spirit of letting go, learning and moving on.

Boch made his case for why chemistry is so important. He said chemistry is something you create through your commitment to each other and your commitment to the way you play the game. Chemistry is a “powerful tool” because it’s intangible, it’s extremely hard to mandate and create. Yet, when you do create it, chemistry is very hard for other teams to replicate, it’s a bond that holds you together in the best and worst of times.

Like culture, Boch told the team that chemistry can be lost in the blink of an eye if they don’t protect it and promote it on the field and in the clubhouse every single day.

Then he asked some provocative questions: “How many great teams have you seen with great chemistry, and then they lose it because they thought it was automatic? They got complacent, they stopped being intentional about feeding, advancing and furthering it. Was that us last year?” Chemistry is not automatic, it’s not static, it is not final.

He didn’t stop there. Boch challenged each of his players to think about what they are going to do—starting with Spring Training—to feed and further the chemistry of the club.”



“Whose back will you have?”

“What sacrifices will you make?”

“What will your unique brand of accountability to this team look like?”

“Bring it, don’t hold back!”

4. Full Lions Don't Hunt

Borrowing a line from Nick Hundley and Hunter Pence, Boch reminded his guys that, “full lions don’t hunt.” He said, “We need to get hungry again.” Referring to the championship years, he felt that some of the players may have become satisfied and complacent because of what they had achieved. Pointing out that the Giants were World Champions not once or twice, but three times, he told them, “That’s yesterday’s news. We can’t rest on yesterday’s headlines. We have to live in the present to achieve more in the future.”

Then, he described what “hungry” looks like. Hungry is the sense of urgency, determination, ambition and focus that comes from not wanting to go another night without a meal.

Hungry is cranking the volume on conditioning. Or in the business context, Hungry is blank space in your day to read, become an SME, to stretch, grow, think outside your comfort zone, and challenge the status quo. Hungry is not taking the fundamentals for granted. Hungry is building the mental toughness to not give in and to bounce back when the odds seem insurmountable. Being hungry was key in the Giants three championships when they faced so many different elimination games.

Hungry is playing every game like you are on a mission to make MVP! Hungry is tackling every assignment, every new project, every customer experience like you’re up for the biggest promotion of your life. Are your people hungry?

5. Focus on NEXT

Comparing the season to driving a car, Boch told his guys that while you occasionally check the rearview mirror and adjust, your main focus is on the road ahead—going forward.

He told them how honored he is to have three rings, but then borrowed a story from Jon Falk, Tom Brady’s college equipment manager and friend at the University of Michigan. Talking to Brady, Falk said, “Tom, you know what my favorite ring is? The NEXT one.”

Boch asked his players, “What’s your next step? What’s your next opportunity to make another player better? The next opportunity to make yourself better? What’s your next opportunity to make this team better? And, what’s your next game going to look like?” All questions you can ask your team as well.

Then, leading by example, he told them, the NEXT thing for him was to turn this [season] around. He told them how competitive he is. How he loves to win. And more important, how much he loves seeing them win. He talked about new members to the team, players like Andrew McCutchen, Evan Longoria, Jeff Samardzija and others who haven’t won a championship and said, “I want to see these guys get a ring too!”

NEXT, is the mindset of a champion. NEXT is the difference between going to the show and winning a World Series. NEXT is the difference between winning a World Series three times and



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creating a dynasty. NEXT is where “championship blood” focuses its attention. What is NEXT for your business? Is it winning a long-term contract that takes your business to the NEXT level. Is it disrupting the status quo and delivering a customer experience that generates life time loyalty. Come up with your BEST NEXT and invite your team to achieve it together.

6. Team-first Not Me-first

If there is a dominant theme Boch has conveyed to his players over the years and one he is absolutely convinced, contributed to three world championships, it is his players’ willingness to choose service over self-interest. So, he started to bring this talk to a close by reminding them that what they wanted to achieve couldn’t be done alone. He said it will only happen when a diverse team of 25 players and rookies come into the majors during the season, by bonding and gelling.

He told them that the key to turning this season around and getting back in the hunt for October is that they must become stronger and unbeatable—TOGETHER. It’s doing things every day to become better—TOGETHER. To become the best they can be—bonded, united and TOGETHER. Is your team bonded, united, better together? Or are they a collection of individual contributors? What can you do to unite and unify the team to help them realize the power of Better Together?



7. Start Strong

Given the heartbreak and embarrassment of last season, Boch feels a sense of urgency. Starting strong is important to him and he believes it is important to his players as well. So, in closing his Spring Training talk, he threw down a call to arms saying, “Guys, I want us to come out of the chute fast and furious!” He compared the sense of urgency he was trying to convey in the start of this season to the start of an Indy or Daytona 500 race.



He said in the warm-up laps you can see the drivers zig-zagging on the track trying to get their tires warmed up and “grippy.” Then, in the final warm-up lap, they want to time it, so they are at max speed when the starting flag drops.

Boch said, “When our flag drops, I want us to be at full throttle! With the talent we have, the mindsets we’ve developed, the fundamentals we honed, if we pull together like we need to and if we work like we are hungry... The season, once again, is ours to celebrate.”

This is what great leaders do. They set the tone and establish the focus. Given how stoic Boch is in the dugout during games, this is a side of Bruce Bochy most of us don’t get to see, this is a conversation only his team gets to hear.

The players responded by saying the message was exactly what they needed. Hunter Pence, whom we all know is not short on words, said he couldn’t add a thing to what Bochy said. And Shark (Jeff Samardzija), took the message about owning clubhouse chemistry to heart immediately. He rallied the guys for a little team bonding on the golf course during the Giants day off.

Messages and rally calls like this aren’t magic pills or silver bullets. But they are ways that every leader conveys passion for what they want their teams to achieve.

And in the bigger scheme of business, baseball and life, everyone wants leadership, people are hungry for hope, vision, conviction and a will to win.

What will you do to grow culture, chemistry, and a championship mindset on your team?

Jackie and Kevin Freiberg
are co-authors of the book

BOCHY BALL!

The Chemistry of Winning and Losing
in Baseball, Business and Life.

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