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Our current athletes. Our future CEOs.

Senior Project

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

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By

Josh Jones

Department of Kinesiology

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Josh Jones Date

Honors College Scholar

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Shane Richardson Date

Faculty Mentor

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Joshua Kalin Busman, Ph.D. Date

Senior Project Coordinator

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to show that university athletics prepares student athletes to be influential business leaders in today’s modern business world. University athletics molds certain skills, life lessons, and characteristics that are needed to be successful in the business world. Leadership is needed to make sure this happens. The transformational leadership model is one that is influential in a positive way and is used by many of today’s leaders, both in athletics and the business profession. Leadership is something that can rarely be defined with one definition but is very critical when it comes to the process of developing. Developing the right mindset is crucial when determining if one will be successful, both in university athletics and the business world. There are many similarities regarding the mindset that is needed to be successful in athletics and the modern business world. The purpose of the research conducted was to determine these similarities. As you read more, you will learn of these similarities and how they relate to one another. You will hear this from both business professionals and current college athletes.

Our current athletes, Our future CEOs.

Athletics at the university level produce resilient, reliable, and successful people who go on to become our world’s top business leaders. However, some may not even think about how the business environment and college athletics relate and provide company to each other in the same conversation. Yet, these two are closely related. 95% of fortune 500 companies’ CEOs participated in athletics at the university level (Carrol, 2015). This statistic depicts the influence that leadership has on college athletes and how this leadership produces successful business workers. To be clear, athletic ability has nothing to do with the success rate of one who aspires to be successful in the business world. These two things do not directly relate. However, they do have one thing in common, they both require a developed mindset to be successful. In order to be successful in one or the other, one needs to develop a mindset, like stated previously, that is resilient and reliable. In order to determine how this mindset is created, I decided the purpose of this research would be to demonstrate to the audience that leadership within university athletics molds and produces respectable employers, employees, and CEOs in our modern business world.

Sports provide an atmosphere that encourages competition and discipline, all while performing at a high level. NCAA athletes know this very well as I will demonstrate this in my studies. To be a successful athlete, one needs leadership. The individual who provides this guidance is known as the leader and in order to comprehend the concept of leadership you need to know the purpose of the leader. A leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower (s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focusses the follower (s) to the organization’s mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically extend various types of energy in effort to accomplish the organization’s mission (Winston & Patterson, 2006). Leadership has a significant impact on the business world like it does in the world of university athletics. Similar to the atmosphere that athletics encourages, the business atmosphere also encourages competition and discipline. The purpose of leadership within a business organization is to get employees to work together to accomplish specific goals in a timely manner. The purpose of the leadership within a college sports team is to guide all members of the team towards accomplishing the common goal of winning. Both purposes are similar in structure but are two topics that are rarely associated with each other. As you read through this paper, you will learn the different leadership methods that are used to develop mindsets in athletes that are transferrable to a business workplace and the different traits that people in both university athletics and business professional’s display.

Leadership is only one of multiple skills one develops in c

ollege athletics, but these skills have to be nurtured, they are not innate. Someone has to teach, show, and ingrain them into individuals. One method that is widely used is the transformational leadership model. Essentially, this causes change in individuals and social systems. This method focuses on the relationship between the leader and the follower. Motivation and emotion are two points of emphasis. There are four components of the transformational leadership model. They are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Kao & Tsai, 2016). In order for someone to change and influence an individual, that person has to be charismatic. They connect with the follower on an emotional level. Leaders who use the transformational model have to motivate as well and they do this by setting high standards, communicating with high levels of optimism, and present meaning for the task at hand. In order for the leader to intellectually stimulate the follower, they need to take risks and encourage (Kao & Tsai, 2016). Transformational leadership has been linked to a variety of skills including self-confidence and pragmatism (Konorti, 2008). This leadership method is extremely prevalent in college athletics. For a coach to use transformational leadership model, they must connect on an emotional level with their athlete, or in other words, they must show that they care. When coaches ask about an athlete’s family, interests, school, and other outside activities, the athletes can tell the coach cares about them as a person (Newland, 2014). Because the coach cared about them on a personal level, the atheltes were inspired to achieve performance beyond expectations. This enhances self-confidence by the leader showing care and connecting on an emotional level. The leader gives the athlete a sense of purpose. If the leader is a team captain, they learn how to inspire, connect, relate, and be charismatic in order to guide someone in a direction in order to accomplish a goal.

As you will learn the transformational leadership model is not only used in athletics, it is also used in our modern business world today. Transformational leaders are known as those who can motivate others to convert personal interests into energy that is put forth towards accomplishing collective goals. CEOs are usually thought of as leaders who motivate a company. Zhu, Chew, and Spangler (2005) grabbed data from 170 businesses in Singapore. This data showed that there is a positive association with CEO’s transformational leadership and organizational outcomes (Jung, et al., 2008). Transformational leadership in the workplace allows for innovation to occur. Charisma and influence have to do with serving as role models. These role models create both professionals and personal commitments that lead to higher levels of self-esteem and self-actualization. It is also found that transformational leaders motivate and push their employees to exceed performance expectations. It was also found that transformational leadership, compared to other leadership styles, was more effective at encouraging followers to think outside of the box (Keller, 1992). Consequently, in the workplace, transformational leadership causes employees to develop higher levels of self-esteem and self-actualization, exceed performance expectations, and think outside of the box. All four of these developed skills or characteristics aid in evolving a mindset that is reliable and resilient which is necessary to be successful in the workplace.

For my research component, I set out to determine and prove that there are multiple similarities regarding how leadership in college athletics transform athletes to be ready and successful in the modern business world. In other words, I wanted to prove that what one learns while competing in university level athletics translates directly to success in a business environment and if the transformational leadership model had any influence in this. In order to do this, I asked a series of questions to a numerous amount of current college athletes. I asked the same questions to those who are strictly involved with a business meaning employees and owners, and I asked the same questions to people who are in the business world now but also played university athletics. In theory, I asked those who have never experienced the business world, meaning the athletes, I asked those who had never experienced university athletics, and I asked those who have experienced both. My goal was to ask three different groups of people with three different perspectives and get similar results. If this happened, my point of university athletics and the leadership within, provides student athletes with skills and develops characteristics that are able to be applied to the work environment. As expected, my findings did just that.

I asked athletes coming from multiple backgrounds, different places, and from different universities. The exact survey is located under appendix A, for reference. The athletes that were surveyed come from institutions such as the University of North Florida, Meredith College, North Carolina State University, and the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. Majority of the participants compete in either football, basketball, or soccer. It is important to understand that for some of the surveyed questions, participants were able to select an answer from the following choices. The choices were extremely important, somewhat important, neutral, somewhat not important, and extremely not important. A section of the survey focused on what skills it takes to be successful in university athletics and one hundred percent of my athletes stated that they believe through their unique experiences, that it is extremely important for one to be disciplined in order to be successful in university athletics. Ninety one percent of them said that it was extremely important to be able to perform under pressure to be successful in university athletics. The other nine percent stated that is was somewhat important. Eighty two percent of my athletes stated that they believed it was extremely important for an individual to be reliable in order to be successful in university athletics. The other eighteen percent stated is was somewhat important. Again, one hundred perecent of the selected participants stated that it was apparent that university athletics presents an atmosphere that encourages discipline and competition. So, I discovered that discipline, reliability, and performing under pressure were all crucial skills athletes develop throughout their time in university athletics and these skills are almost a necessity when it comes to being successful.

In order to understand why these athletes believed this and how they arrived at these answers, I asked them a few questions regarding their experience with leadership in university athletics. One hundred percent believed that in order for leadership to be effective both the leader and follower must understand the leader/follower relationship. One hundred percent also believed that the most effective leadership involves charisma and positive reinforcement. These two characteristics are both characteristics of a transformational leader who uses the transformational leadership style. This means that they believe that transformational leadership model is the most effective leadership style when it comes to developing skills that will be used going into the workforce. To go along with transformational leadership, I asked if their leader encourages outside of the box thinking which also happens to be a characteristic of a transformational leader. Eighty two percent believed this to be true.

Another section of the survey, directed towards the same participants, focused on if they thought the skills they learned and developed throughout their experience playing university athletics were able to be carried over into their future profession and business workplace. One hundred percent of the participants believed that university athletics develop skills that are used in life, long after their playing days are done, especially in the workplace. So based on the participants I surveyed that are currently participating in university athletics, I found that they believe that the skills they learn during their playing career, meaning discipline, reliability, and performing under pressure, can carry over and aid in being successful in the business world.

In order to understand and determine validity of their answers I proceeded to ask the same questions to those who are involved in a business workplace regarding the skills needed to succeed and their experience with leadership within an organization. For reference, the exact survey is located under Appendix B. My participants for this group consisted of employees, employers, and owners of law firms, professional motivational speakers, and businesses in the sustainabilty industry. Some of these participants also participated in university athletics. So having both perspectives was neat and provided huge insight. I chose these participants because it provided me with the opportunity to have access to different types of companies’ opinions and perspectives. Regarding discipline, seventy five percent said it was extremely important to be disciplined in order to be successful in the business world. Seventy five percent also said that they believed that one needs to be able to perform under pressure in the business environment. One hundred percent said that being reliable was extremely important in order to be successful. An interesting fact I discovered from this survey was that one hundred percent of the participants stated that they believe that discipline, self-esteem, and self-actualization were all skills that are needed to be successful. A study was done regarding these three skills and their relationship to the transformational leadership model when used in university athletics and the results showed that when a leader used the transformational leadership style, athletes developed these three attributes (Keller, 1992). This proves my theory of skills developed in university athletics can be directly translated to the business world. When multiple business employees, employers, and owners say that they are needed to be successful, it makes the theory valid.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Conducted to Student Athletes.

1. Are you above the age of 18?
   1. Yes
   2. No
2. Do you compete in university athletics?
   1. Yes
   2. No
3. In order to succeed in college athletics, how important is it for one to be disciplined?
   1. Extremely important
   2. Somewhat important
   3. Neutral
   4. Somewhat not important
   5. Extremely not important
4. In order to succeed in college athletics, how important is it for one to be able to perform under pressure?
   1. Extremely important
   2. Somewhat important
   3. Neutral
   4. Somewhat not important
   5. Extremely not important
5. In order to succeed in college athletics, how important is it for one to be reliable?
   1. Extremely important
   2. Somewhat important
   3. Neutral
   4. Somewhat not important
   5. Extremely not important
6. Do you feel as if college athletics provides an atmosphere that encourages discipline and competition?
   1. Yes
   2. No
7. Would you say that a leader is one who equips followers with the skills to be successful?
   1. Yes
   2. No
8. Would you say that a leader needs to understand the leader/follower relationship?
   1. Yes
   2. No
9. Would you say that the follower needs to understand the leader/follower relationship?
   1. Yes
   2. No
10. Would you describe your coach/leader as someone who is motivating?
    1. Yes
    2. No
11. Would you say that college athletics provides life skills?
    1. Yes
    2. No
12. Based on your experience, would you describe these skills as skills you can carry over into the workplace?
    1. Yes
    2. No
13. Do you believe that your team has good leadership?
    1. Yes
    2. No
14. Do you believe that the most effective leader connects with you on an emotional level?
    1. Yes
    2. No
15. Would you say that the most effective leadership styles involve charisma and positive influence?
    1. Yes
    2. No
16. Do you believe that your leader brings out the best in you?
    1. Yes
    2. No
17. Does your leader encourage you think outside the box?
    1. Yes
    2. No
18. Would you say that your leader is transformational? (Meaning they are able to connect and push people towards a common goal)
    1. Yes
    2. No
19. Do you think you have been equipped with skills that will allow you to be successful in the workplace when you are done competing?
    1. Yes
    2. No
20. Can the skills needed to be successful in college athletics correlate to the skills needed to be successful in the business world?
    1. Yes
    2. No

Apendix B: Survey to Business Leaders

1. Are you above the age of 18?
   1. Yes
   2. No
2. How important would you say that in order to succeed in the business world, one needs to be disciplined?
   1. Extremely important
   2. Somewhat important
   3. Neutral
   4. Somewhat not important
   5. Extremely not important
3. How important would you say that it is that in order to succeed in the business world, one needs to be able to perform under pressure?
   1. Extremely important
   2. Somewhat important
   3. Neutral
   4. Somewhat not important
   5. Extremely not important
4. How important would you say that it is that in order to succeed in the business world, one needs to be reliable?
   1. Extremely important
   2. Somewhat important
   3. Neutral
   4. Somewhat not important
   5. Extremely not important
5. Do you feel as if the business workplace encourages an environemtn that is competitive?
   1. Yes
   2. No
6. Do you feel as if the business workplace encourages an environment that demands one is discipline to be successful?
   1. Yes
   2. No
7. Do you feel that your business is equipped with high level leadership that is effective?
   1. Yes
   2. No
8. Do you feel as if leadership has a significant impact on your business’ success?
   1. Yes
   2. No
9. Are you motivated by your leader or CEO?
   1. Yes
   2. No
10. Do you feel that your best source of leadership is from your company’s CEO?
    1. Yes
    2. No
11. Do you feel that discipline, self esteem, and self actualization are key skills to have in order to be successful in the business world?
    1. Yes
    2. No
12. Do you think these same skills, listed in the previous question, are implemented on a college athletics level?
    1. Yes
    2. No
    3. Maybe, I am not sure.
13. Do you feel that if someone was to apply for your company who participated in college athletics and you were apart of the selection committee, they would be equipped with the necessary skills to succeed?
    1. Yes
    2. No
    3. Maybe, I am not sure.