

We're hearing a lot lately about the disconnect between strategy and execution, expectation and experience. Mike Leach, football coach at Texas Tech, has an interesting perspective on execution...



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How to win with the B players

About sports, strategy, and doing things differently

There's an unusual football coach at Texas Tech, [Mike Leach](#), who was recently profiled in a New York Times Magazine article. He has taken a team full of B players and set records. I'm not a football fan, but I saw a lot of parallels to business problems that I've worked on with clients:

Don't do what the big guys are doing

Texas Tech can't attract the calibre of player that the elite schools can. So they can only win if they play a different kind of game, using a different strategy. They play a passing game, with more receivers than most teams. They spread out their offense so the Quarterback can see what's going on. They spend time on the field studying their opponent's reactions to various plays. Then they use that learning to advantage.

If you run a business and you aren't the best funded, don't have the best locations, and aren't the market share leader, you'd better have a different plan than the big guy. Because you can only lose playing the big guy's game.

Change the nature of competition

Don't accept the conventional wisdom about how to win -- change the game to your advantage. If you think carefully about your customers, the competitors, the dynamics of your market space, and your own areas of strength, you may be able to find ways to turn the conventional wisdom on its ear. Can you design better products that make your competitor's distribution advantages irrelevant? Can you provide customized service that makes your competitor's pricing irrelevant?

Give your staff the room to use their own judgment -- they're the ones on the field watching the action

Managers act as if front line staff need full latitude or no latitude, and often seem to ignore the middle ground. Leach calls the main play, but the QB customizes it each time, based on what he sees happening in front of him. They don't have as many plays as other teams, but they customize them a lot based on local conditions. Players don't have to memorize a giant play-book -- they memorize the main formations, and the variations.

When we limit the ability of staff to respond to what is in front of them, we reduce the chances that we will succeed. We also remove most of the fun and intrinsic rewards from the job.

Have you found the balance between too much direction and not enough?

You Don't have to be a Great Player to be a Great Coach

Leach played football only in high school. He studied law at Pepperdine. Then he decided he wanted to become a football coach.

A lot of people in business excuse themselves from coaching because they don't think they are better at -- say selling -- than the people working for them. That's not what good coaching is all about. It's about observation, strategy, direction, focus and feedback.

Wishing you the best of the holiday season.

Susan Abbott

Original Article: Coach Leach Goes Deep, Very Deep, [New York Times Magazine](#), Dec 4, 2005. Subscription required for archives.

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