

The Denver Business Journal

September 28, 2001

Business Strategies

Effective leaders will make some people unhappy



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In the week before the football season started, up to the day before America was attacked, a local television station helped Denverites analyze - and then vote for - who should be starting halfback for the Broncos; Terrell Davis, Olandis Gary or Mike Anderson.

Many people were unhappy because coach Mike Shanahan did not listen to them; he didn't do the "right thing." What a silly waste of time.

It's the same for your team, your company, your country. Great leaders do not agree with everyone's uninformed opinion, any decision will inevitably make some people unhappy, leaders still move

ahead, and our job is to suck it up and get on board.

Sometimes, our preferences don't count.

We don't know what's really going on in the locker room and on the field. We're not responsible for deciding. We're just Monday morning quarterbacks, even though we may suffer with the consequences. Shanahan's job requires him not to listen to us. If he listened, he wouldn't be a good coach. Even though we're affected, starting halfback is not a consensus decision for fans, commentators or even players.

Someone's interests will be hurt, and not everyone will be pleased.

Most people lobby for their own narrow desires, ideas and beliefs. No matter what decision Shanahan made, someone would be out of work, but that's less important than the team succeeding.

If terrorists make curbside check-in at airports too dangerous and skycaps lose their jobs, there are more important gains. If some businesses in Denver's airport lose revenue they counted on, conditions have

changed and there are more important goals.

When Jackie Robinson finally integrated baseball, the so-called "Negro leagues" were destroyed. Ballplayers, writers, secretaries and bus drivers lost their jobs. But the greater good was integration.

The first priority for Bush and his government is to rally the people of this country beyond self-indulgence, irritation at inconveniences, and lesser concerns; to making us powerful enough to protect ourselves from determined enemies; to self-sacrifice and heroism.

Growth of the American economy in New England in the early 1800's, was made possible because the technology necessary for mass producing cloth goods, stolen from the British, was put in place despite displacing

workers who now had out-dated skills. The economic and social benefits were more important and the displaced workers just had to cope.

In England, disputing factions maintained their previous slices of the pie and, for decades, prevented installation of needed changes. Eventually, poverty and rioting forced decisions that stimulated the whole economy.

Businesses and jobs are always being destroyed and created. Loss is just as much a part of the process as gain.

Great leaders do not operate on consensus and must not give in to complaining driven by narrow interests.

Of course, effective leaders carefully assess expert input, including that from front line staff, but ultimately, the leader makes the decisions.

They must put the best interests of the whole

company and country ahead of individual preferences, upset, inconvenience or loss.

Decisions will inevitably displease some people. Tough.

For example, many people were unhappy that President Bush violated their notions of separation of church and state by saying, “God bless America.” Others thought that our major concern should be using peace - not force - and making sure that not one innocent person was harmed.

The first priority for Bush and his government is to rally the people of this country beyond self-indulgence, irritation at inconveniences, and lesser concerns; to making us powerful enough to protect ourselves from determined enemies; to self-sacrifice and heroism. If we don’t do that, we won’t be strong enough to insure secondary concerns like separation of church and state, due process or reducing

collateral damage in our response to enemies.

You and your leadership team, like Shanahan and his coaches, must keep your company powerful and profitable in the face of economic slowdown and fierce competition.

Our job is to participate whole-heartedly and fully, even if we don’t agree completely with the leader’s decisions.

If you’re offended by some processes or decisions, thanks for sharing. Your feelings and concerns may be less important than other considerations, so let it go. If you can’t get behind the program, get scorned or get lost.

This country was made great by people who did what they thought would succeed, usually in opposition to “expert” analysis, speculation and criticism, and despite the unhappiness of narrow interests.