

Find a Way to Win

*A conversation on managing
great team performances with Terry Michler,
America's All-Time Winningest High School Soccer Coach*

by

Dan Coughlin

The Game led to The Conversation.

In searching for powerful insights to improve group performance it's important to always stay open-minded to every possibility. On November 21, 2009, I took my eight-year-old son, Ben, to see the Missouri Class 3 Boys State High School Championship game. I wanted him to see soccer played at a very high level. Little did I realize what was going to happen starting that night and continuing over the next few weeks.

The game was won by the CBC (Christian Brothers College) Cadets 1-0, but much more than that was the way they won. It was the single finest display of soccer I've ever seen at any level including collegiate and professional. CBC displayed a relentless intensity of passing, attacking, moving without the ball, and winning the ball back for the entire eighty minutes. Every player was in sync with each of his teammates.

We sat in the first row and barely heard the players talking. They seemed to know where to go and what to do spontaneously. They had no wasted effort or activities. It all resulted in a precise, attacking style of play where every member fulfilled his responsibilities offensively and defensively in a remarkable manner. It was like watching a world-class jazz ensemble performing at their highest level. The other team was a very good team and had beaten CBC twice earlier in the season, but they could barely make two passes in a row and never had a shot on goal throughout the championship match.

When I got home that night I sent a congratulatory e-mail to Terry Michler, the head soccer coach at CBC. He and I had met briefly 20 years earlier and I just wanted to congratulate him on one of the most amazing group performances I've ever seen in athletics, business, education, or entertainment. I didn't think he remembered me, and I certainly didn't expect a reply.

...and then the magic started to happen.

Terry Michler is the all-time winningest high school soccer coach in the United States. In his 39 seasons he has won over 800 games and six state championships. More than 200 of his players have played college soccer and more than 30 have played professionally. However, he sent me an e-mail that said, "Thanks for the kind words -- I enjoy what I do and I continue to learn more about what I need to do -- the passion to learn is still there." Those last seven words really caught my attention.

Let me repeat. Terry Michler has been coaching at CBC for 39 years. He has six state championships. He has won more games than any high school soccer coach in the U.S. has ever won. Yet he still has the passion to learn how to be better at what he does. I wrote an article about the importance of investing 10,000 hours of sustained thought-filled practice in order to achieve expertise in any activity and I mentioned Terry in it. I sent it to him, and then we began to seriously exchange e-mails.

I realized that not only did Terry have powerful insights on great group performances, but that he was also willing to share them with me. He sent me a copy of his book, *Dutch 'Total Football'*, where he described the enormous influence that the Dutch Coaching Approach to soccer, which is called football everywhere outside of the United States, has had on him. He explained that he has been to the Netherlands nine times in the past 12 years to study Dutch Football. There are more people coaching national soccer teams from Holland than from any other country. As I read his book I realized that what he was describing about Dutch football had tremendous implications for business managers.

10 days after the championship game Terry and I sat down for three hours to discuss in much greater detail his thoughts on how to generate great group performances. This article is written for managers. I define a manager as a person who is responsible for the results of a group performance. Whether you are a business owner, CEO, sales manager, not-for-profit executive director, youth coach, or the head of a volunteer group project, these ideas have been written for you.

After each of Terry's responses I've tried to convert his comments into a management insight that I hope is useful for you. I encourage you to do the same. Consider what Terry has said and ask yourself what insight you have gained from him that you can capture and apply with your group.

Dan Coughlin: How do you define a team and what does it take to build a great team?

Terry Michler: A team is a group with a common focus that works together to achieve a common goal. First, you need basic talent. I take the best players available regardless of what year in school they are in. On the very first team I had a freshman starting on the varsity. So I evaluate the available talent and I select the very best players regardless of how old they are.

You need all the right ingredients to build a championship team. Then you need to get players to buy into a common purpose. At CBC, tradition plays a big part in getting the players to focus. They are part of a soccer program that has been very successful for over sixty years.

Management Insight: Does your group have a common focus? Are the members working together to achieve a common goal? Does your group have the basic ingredients necessary for success? Are you selecting the very best talent for your organization regardless of the person's age? These are the starting points to eventually achieve extraordinary results as a group.

Dan Coughlin: What can ruin a great team's performance and has it ever happened to one of your teams?

Terry Michler: That's easy to explain: a "me instead of we attitude" will do it every time. It ruins the team's performance when players have a bad attitude or when every player has to have the ball all of the time.

Whenever you're in anything long enough you get a little bit of everything. Occasionally, very rarely in fact, I've had a group of talented players who got along great everywhere except on the field. I needed 11 soccer balls to keep all of them happy. Unfortunately there is only one ball. When that happens you try your best, and then you move on to the next season. Decide whether it's correctable or not. Not every year will be perfect. Don't beat yourself over the head for it. Assess it and correct it if you can. Take it for what it is.

Management Insight: Building a great team takes a lot of intentional effort. Ruining a team can happen very quickly. Be aware of individuals who focus primarily on their personal rewards and recognition. Assembling very talented employees is powerful, but only if they are working toward the common purpose and goals of the team and not just toward their own individual glory and income.

Dan Coughlin: How do you get super talented soccer players who are stars on great club teams to pull together and support one another?

Terry Michler: I don't value a star concept. I don't make a big deal about post season awards. After we won the state championship this year, we had a couple of players who were named All-American and one player who was named Player-of-the-Year in St. Louis. But I don't make a big deal about that. I don't want the players who did their roles as well as they could and were very successful in doing so to feel bad because they didn't get the big honors.

I don't want a star system because if everything depends on the star player and he has a bad day, then we lose. This year we had different players step up every game. The other teams couldn't just concentrate on stopping one player.

One way we foster teamwork is to have every soccer player at all levels from varsity to the freshman team wear the exact same practice uniforms. So on Mondays they all wear certain colors. Then on Tuesday they have different colored practice uniforms, but they are the same at all levels. The players pay for the practice uniforms at the beginning of the season and then they get to keep them. I brought that idea back from the European club teams. It helps build a sense of pride in being a part of the team, and it also helps to break down the star system. It doesn't matter if a player is All-American or the third string player on the freshmen team. He still wears the same practice uniform as everyone else for that day.

Management Insight: Teamwork is not complicated to explain, but it's not easy to build either. Avoid the star system that makes it seem that one or two star performers generated all of the results. Treat all the members of your organization with an equal degree of respect. Just as better soccer players get more playing time and bigger college scholarships, certain employees will get better assignments and bigger salaries. However they can be treated with an equal degree of respect.

Dan Coughlin: How do you determine the best role for each member of the team?

Terry Michler: First, develop roles for every member of the team. The better players have bigger roles with more responsibilities, but they are still just doing their role. Everyone on our team has a role. I make it very clear what each player is supposed to do. Then every player is expected to fulfill his role as well as he can.

I'm big on "paired opposites." One year I had a lightning fast forward so I paired him with a really skillful player. If there was a long pass into an open space, the fast player's role was to run onto the ball. If it was a shorter pass on the ground, it was the more skillful player's role to gather the ball in and distribute it. Throughout the entire team we find paired opposites so that players can complement one another in what they are doing.

Everybody has a vested interest this way, and they're all part of the outcome. This way everyone is much more motivated to do a great job because our team depends on each player successfully fulfilling his role.

Management Insight: In your organization, does every member of the group understand the responsibilities of his or her role? Are individuals paired with someone who brings complementary strengths? Do the members of your group have a vested personal interest in the success of the team? Do they feel that the team might fail if they don't fulfill their individual

roles? Focus on talent management, which includes organizing individual talent into “paired opposites” that can make each part of the organization stronger.

Dan Coughlin: What does it take for an individual to become an extraordinary performer?

Terry Michler: Motivation plays a big part. It’s always best if motivation is intrinsic where the kids want to get better, but sometimes I have to provide some additional motivation for the players. If I need to be with a player at every moment to motivate him, then that’s a problem. There comes a moment when the player is on his own. If he can’t motivate himself, then he’ll never be an extraordinary performer. Some players need constant reinforcement, and they just aren’t going to become extraordinary performers.

Motivation is important because no player can be an extraordinary performer without having taken his technical skills to a very, very high level. To do that requires thousands of hours of practice with an effective coach. No player will be willing to do that if he is not motivated to improve. And most of that motivation has to come from within the player.

Sometimes a results-driven player is under too much pressure from other people and that can get in the way of a great performance. Occasionally a player’s dad or brother will constantly hound him to score more goals and do more things on the field. When that happens I pull the player aside and just ask him how he’s doing. Eventually the player usually confides in me what is happening. Then I tell the player that I really believe in him and that the results will eventually come for him, but for now I want him to just relax and have fun. I point out the things he is doing well and tell him not to worry about the other stuff. A lot of times I don’t have an answer for the person at all, but as I allow him to talk and really listen to him I can see him becoming much more relaxed.

Players can’t perform if they are under too much stress. I want them to be relaxed because soccer requires a lot of mental and physical effort during the game. In soccer, there’s so much mental and physical flow that I don’t want to interrupt it, and so I don’t yell out to the players during the game. I just let them play.

Management Insight: Are your employees intrinsically motivated, or do you have to provide constant motivation for them to perform? If you always have to be there for them, how will they create and deliver more value for the customers? If they are not intrinsically motivated, you may very well have the wrong group of employees.

When you have a terrific employee who is performing well below his or her normal standards and stoking too much pressure on himself or herself, take some time to sit down with the person in a one-to-one meeting. Patiently allow the person to share with you what is bothering him or her. Eventually you may help the person to relax and that can create the dynamics for a great performance.

Dan Coughlin: Are intensity, toughness, and aggressiveness important ingredients in being a great player? Why do you feel that way?

Terry Michler: Mental toughness may be the single most important ingredient, in my mind, because there are too many distractions and “shortcuts” that can interfere with maximizing potential. The truly great player has a single-mindedness of purpose and does not allow himself to be knocked off his course of action.

All the ingredients you asked about are both physical and mental, and I am a big believer that the mental aspect is the most important. The will and determination that drives people to greatness may be exemplified through physical action, but the mental part is the driving force. You can readily determine the physical component through visual observation, but it may take a trained eye to observe the finer points of mental toughness and intensity.

The truly great player knows that losing is part of the deal, but they exhaust all means possible to prevent that from happening. The deciding factor when all things are equal usually comes down to the one with the stronger mental make-up. Can you really fight through all the obstacles, stay focused, not get too high or too low, and be at your best even when things are not going your way? The really great players can always find a way to get it done, even though it may be with less style points on some occasions. When the final score matters, they will be the ones with the best chance to win.

Management Insight: Notice Terry's emphasis on mental toughness over physical toughness. Toughness is not about being macho and screaming at people. It's about staying focused over the long term and carrying the project to a successful conclusion. Look for employees with the mental toughness to persevere and help other people persevere through all the obstacles that stand in the way of success. If anything has been proven in the past ten years, it's that individuals in business who try to take shortcuts in order to avoid the tough situations end up ruining the group's results.

Dan Coughlin: If you have to choose between a superior soccer player with a bad attitude and a poor work ethic and a person with a great attitude and great work ethic but below average soccer skills and mediocre physical traits, what do you do?

Terry Michler: First of all you want to try to work the first case until you see no hope. Many times a good give-and-take conversation reveals reasons for all that and then you can work through those reasons. You would never just want to dismiss that player without exhausting all the avenues first. Many times that type of person uses those behaviors as defense mechanisms to cover up insecurities. Sometimes when you give those people more responsibility, they really take off.

Of course, this is not always the case. There are times when you are dealing with a real jerk who wants NO PART of what you're offering. If you keep him, he becomes a cancer. By cutting him it is addition by subtraction. In the end these types of people will more often let you down than fulfill any promise of potential.

The other type will never reach great heights of performance as soccer players, but given a certain role in the team, they can and do become very useful and helpful. You could not build a successful team with a team of those types, but they can be a part of it.

Building a team to me is like putting a puzzle together -- no two pieces are ever really the same but they still have to fit to complete the puzzle. Every piece has its place where it fits comfortably. The key is to identify the individual qualities of the players and then weave them together into a cohesive unit, where each person is doing his thing in the best interest of the team as a whole.

Management Insight: First, notice Terry's honesty about the second type of performer. These types of individuals "will never reach great heights of performance as soccer players." Managers

sometimes fool themselves into believing that a person with a great attitude and work rate can suddenly become technically very proficient and significantly improve business results. Then the manager becomes very frustrated and upset when the individual doesn't contribute in an extraordinary way. Technical skills and knowledge are important. They should be sought out in the recruitment process. The individual without technical strength may help the organization, but an organization with only these types of performers will not achieve greatness.

Then notice how Terry is willing to invest time with a high potential performer who has a bad attitude. He's explaining the upside of uncovering insecurities and helping a person move past this lack of self-esteem. He's also explaining the upside of addition by subtraction. A true jerk cannot be "coached" into being an asset to a group's effort.

Dan Coughlin: How do you maintain your enthusiasm after all these years of dealing with the weather, angry parents, frustrated fans, etc?

Terry Michler: I've gotten to the point that not too many things affect me. Everybody has their passion. I really love coaching high school soccer. If you can just keep the negative stuff in perspective and know that it's part of the role, then you can handle it pretty well.

You don't have to accept the verbal stuff people are dumping on you. If you accept it, then you have to deal with it. If you don't accept it, then you don't have to deal with it. I used to teach a class here called Health. I talked a lot about self-esteem and how important it is to deal with negative stuff by not accepting it.

The keys really are to avoid distractions and focus on the game, the team, and the individual players.

Management Insight: Are you doing what you are passionate about doing? Do you see a clear purpose for your work? Do you really buy into that purpose? Are you capable of not accepting negative garbage that people throw at you? These questions have a lot to do with how long you will be able to maintain your enthusiasm.

Dan Coughlin : What have been the defining moments in your career, both the good ones and the bad ones? What did you learn from those defining moments?

Terry Michler: When I was in eighth grade, a certain nun encouraged me to go to CBC High School. I had never really thought of it before that moment, but after she said that, this is where I wanted to go. When I graduated I knew I wanted to come back and teach and coach at CBC. When I graduated from Rockhurst College I had a chance to go back to CBC and coach the "B" team, but I passed. I had just signed a contract to play professional soccer in Kansas City.

When I played professional soccer for two years I was one of only two Americans on the team. I learned a lot from spending time with players from all over the world. That really broadened my perspective on soccer.

Two years later I was called again to come back to CBC, except this time I was asked to be the varsity head coach. I practically ran back. I couldn't wait to start.

Another defining moment was in 1997 when I received the opportunity to go to Holland for a 10-Day Coaching Symposium. That changed everything for me. Since then my biggest influences have been coaches in Holland. I do a lot of reaching out to European soccer coaches. I have worked hard to really understand the Dutch Vision for soccer. When you put yourself out

there you open yourself to what you don't know and your own insecurities. A lot of times people get a little bit of success and a little bit of knowledge and they don't want anyone to mess with it.

If you never try anything new, when are you going to move forward? You have to move forward at some point. The older I get the more I'm convinced everything happens for a reason. I always stay open to the possibility that I'm going to learn from someone.

Management Insight: Know your defining moments and be prepared to learn from them. Terry has been at CBC for 43 of the past 47 years, all because an eighth grade teacher encouraged him to follow that path. Then at the age of 50 he gets a chance to travel to Holland to learn from master coaches. Be open to the moment. You don't know when a regular moment will become a defining moment in your life.

Dan Coughlin: What drove you to attend a 10-Day coaching symposium in Holland in 1997 after you had already been the head coach for 25 years, won more than 600 games, and had three state championships? You were already the all-time winningest high school soccer coach in U.S. history by that point. What else did you have to prove?

Terry Michler: It depends on what you're looking for. I've never coached because I wanted a certain number of wins. I wanted to learn more in 1997 and I still do. I wanted to get better and I wanted the opportunity to go to Holland to study under some of the world's greatest soccer coaches. I have no coaching license. It's not about the license. It's about the learning. It's all about achieving the best performance possible and avoiding complacency -- staying in the game and trying to stay ahead of the competition -- once you think you're there, you are closer to being done than you ever realized -- nothing ever stands still. I'm a free thinker and I always want to improve my approach to coaching.

Management Insight: Are you working for a certain number or a certain honor or a certain salary? If that is what's driving you, you won't likely generate a great team performance. The ultimate performer always wants to improve. The real test is what you do after you have all the highest honors. Are you still willing to push yourself to learn how to be a more effective manager?

Dan Coughlin: In your book, *Dutch 'Total Football'*, you talked about the importance of insight. What does the word "insight" mean to you, why is it so important, and how do you gain it?

Terry Michler: Insight is how you see something unfold whether it's in relationships, on the field, or within the team. Insight affects a person's perspective, mentality, and behaviors. If you are looking at a situation for what it really is, rather than for what you want it to be, you will see it very differently.

I really think I look at things differently than most people. Experience lends itself to improved insight. I'll give you an example. In the state quarterfinal game we were playing the next highest rated team in the state behind us. We had already played them three times during the season. It's very hard to beat a team four times in a row. In those three games they only scored one goal against us. They had the most experienced team of anyone in the state. Several of their starters were starters for three years.

I had four days to get the team ready for that game. I had an insight based on my experience that what we needed to win was a tougher mindset. When you have experience you fall back on the realization that you've been here before and you know what needs to be done. Instead of practicing the boys a lot and going over a lot of soccer stuff, I decided to focus on the idea of "The Will of a Champion." I wanted them to focus on having confidence and mental toughness.

I showed the team videotapes of the great Liverpool teams in the late seventies and early eighties. Then I showed them a tape of the 2005 Liverpool team. Liverpool was down 3-0 at halftime, but fought back to win the game 4-3. I wanted the boys to see the importance of having the will to win no matter what happened in the quarterfinal game. Our theme was "stay in the game." They saw and heard from the champions what it took to win. We only practiced soccer for 20 minutes on each of the practice days. We spent the vast majority of our time watching videos of great teams.

With 10 minutes left in the game, the other team scored a goal and went ahead of us. But our team responded right away and tied the game. During the five minute break before overtime started, I said to the boys, "Remember the will of a champion. Visualize yourself doing whatever it takes to win this game." And that's exactly what they did. We won in overtime. How did I have the insight that this particular game was going to come down to mental toughness more than soccer ability? Experience.

To get ready for the state semi-finals and finals, I felt we needed to change things up. I felt we needed to focus on playing better. Everything we did in the three practices leading up to the last two games was focused on quick passing and going to goal. Insight comes from thinking before you do something. Ask yourself, "What does this situation call for?"

Management Insight: Terry is giving real insight into the importance of insights. While you are marching through the many meetings you have every day, step back on a regular basis and ask yourself, "What does this situation call for?" Lean on your experience to help you see what is unfolding and what you need to do to be effective.

Dan Coughlin: How have you been able to improve your performance as the coach of the team while staying within the same organization for 39 years?

Terry Michler: Every team is different. Every year presents new and different challenges. There is no place for complacency if I want us to be successful. It doesn't matter how many years I've been here. Each year is a unique situation that requires me to stay focused.

Management Insight: It doesn't matter how long you've worked within an organization. What does matter is continually looking for ways to be effective in dealing with the challenges you are facing.

Dan Coughlin: What parallels do you see between a high school soccer team and a business, whether it's a small, medium, or large business?

Terry Michler: In my opinion, there are a lot of parallels. They all need organizational plans, motivation, goals/expectations, and action plans. You need to do things the right way through correct repetitions with maximum participation and maximum enjoyment.

Start with the product, perfect the product, and do it so often in the right way that it becomes second nature to do it that way. Our “product” is our performance during the games. Every organization has a product or service that it needs to perfect by doing things the right way so often that it just becomes second nature for them.

You reach the goal away from the job as much as you do on the job. You have to get away from the work. You can’t enjoy it when you are absorbed in it all the time. Fun comes from your perspective, the way you approach your work. Work has to be fun or otherwise people won’t be able to do their best.

In business and in soccer you have to learn to communicate with people. The Dutch are the best traders in the world. They had to learn to speak everyone else’s language first because they are such a small country. In school, they learn French, English, and German. They speak better English than people in the United States do. They prepare themselves to be able to communicate with people from lots of different countries. Consequently, there are more Dutch soccer coaches around the world than from anywhere else.

Collaboration is important both in business and in soccer. The state championship game was at 6 PM on a Saturday. That morning we had a meeting with the players at 10:30. I asked the players, “What do you think is the best way to play tonight? How do you want to play?” I listened to their ideas and took it all in. Then I said, “Let me show you some ideas I have.” We discussed the ideas for awhile and then we landed on the game plan that we stuck to that night. At the end of the meeting, I said, “Are you guys ok with doing it this way?” They said they were. It was a good plan with perfect execution by the players.

A few days after the championship game I saw a mother of one of the players. She told me her son came home after that meeting and said, “As soon as we walked out of that room I knew we were going to win.” For me, it was a fulfilling moment to sit back and watch the game. It was the fulfillment of all of my experiences and insights.

Management Insight: Focus on perfecting whatever it is that you sell. Prepare yourself to be able to communicate with people who have vastly different backgrounds and experiences than you do. Think about your team and reflect on the importance of organizational plans that the members of the group have input in developing, intrinsic motivation, clear goals and expectations, and specific, agreed upon action plans. Make sure to keep the work enjoyable and maximize participation toward improving results.

Dan Coughlin: Have players ever shared with you how a lesson they learned through soccer has application in the business world?

Terry Michler: Absolutely!! The common thread is that hard work, believing in yourself and not giving up always keep you in the hunt. I had a player send me a congratulatory email after this most recent Championship – he was a member of a previous Championship team at CBC and most of his letter dealt with what he learned through soccer that leads him every day as he runs his own business today. With his permission, here is an excerpt from his letter to me, which I think says it all about the relationship between soccer and business:

I have 2 daughters who recently asked me who the biggest influences in my life have been as part of a school assignment. Along with my father I told them that you were one of the

biggest and they asked me why.

I told them that my senior year in high school I almost gave up on myself completely. I was never a good student primarily because I didn't put in the effort. I was questioned by several teachers about being lazy, spoiled and not driven in any way. Their criticism was the last thing I needed. I was merely young, confused, insecure, and I think probably a little depressed.

I decided to quit the team and take the path of least resistance. This seemed the right way to get out of the firing line. I hadn't quit because I was unhappy in my role on the team, quite the opposite. I quit out of shame and a total lack of belief in myself.

After a call from you I decided to give it another try.

I went on to have a senior soccer year that would be one of the best years of my life. You put me in a position to succeed and treated me in a way few others had. To this day that season helps set the tempo for the way I handle myself on a daily basis. That year you gave me self belief and rekindled my love for the game that would continue throughout that year. I know now that it was because of your qualities as a coach.

I dread to think of how things would have turned out if I had not had that senior year under your influence. It gave me a year to treasure and helped me shed many self doubts. While many challenges followed I had the strength to battle because of you and that year and I think of it often.

I know without you that would never have been possible. All the wins mean a lot, but I thought you'd also like to know the long-term influence you had on your players.

I for one will never forget it.

Management Insight: Beyond earning money and taking care of your family, the greatest aspect of being a manager is the impact you have on other people's lives. Your legacy as a manager is not completely summarized by the P&L Statement. The much greater legacy is what happens to the individuals you worked with along the way. You may never know the difference you will make in other people's lives in the future. However, manage in a way that 20 years from now someone might still be using what you taught them to generate better sustainable results.

Dan Coughlin: What role does patience play in the building of a great team?

Terry Michler: Patience is huge in building a great team. That's more so today than ever before. I'm more conscious of what I'm going to say before I say it. I always try to take my time and gather my thoughts and say things in a way that my players can hear them. 30 years ago I would have been all over them.

Management Insight: Don't obsess over doing whatever it takes to make every quarter the most important quarter with the best results. Patience is a critical driver of great team results.

Dan Coughlin: You once said “the game is all about using the ball in the most efficient way.” I’ve never heard that before. What do you mean by that?

Terry Michler: I keep trying to make things simpler. The word is efficiency. A lot of times I use the example of an old air-conditioning unit. It works harder, costs more, and does less than a new air-conditioning unit. It’s not as efficient. I want my teams to be as efficient as possible. I don’t want them to waste effort doing things just to do them. I want every pass and every decision to minimize wasted energy. I want them to pour their energy into doing the things that will increase our chances of winning. The state championship game was a great example. Our team was very efficient. The players were not tired at the end of that game. They could have kept playing for a long time.

I love teaching people the simplicity of Dutch soccer. I learned the incredible importance of efficiency to the Dutch from my trips to Holland. They have 16 million people living in a country that is a little smaller than twice the state of New Jersey. The Dutch have to make the most of every inch. That’s efficiency. All the space in Holland goes up vertically. The architecture makes the absolute most out of every inch. They have bicycle garages like we have car garages. Think how efficient a bike is: no gas, it lasts a long time, and it’s comfortable. They play the game of soccer with the same focus on efficiency. They are all about making the game as simple as possible. The simple way can be the hardest thing to do most of the time, but, then again, isn’t it all about perspective?

There are four keys to improving efficiency: habits, mentality, preparation, and opportunity. I’m really big on good work habits. I want the players doing things the right way over and over and over. I think this develops a stronger sense of mentality and attention to detail. All of this contributes to efficiency when an opportunity presents itself during a game. They know they are prepared to make the right decisions no matter what situation comes up.

Management Insight: In listening to Terry, I landed on the concept of “purposeful efficiency.” Peter Drucker made an interesting statement years ago when he said that great managers are efficient because they do things right and great leaders are effective because they do the right things. However, to compete successfully amidst today’s global competition, it’s critically important to do the right things in the right way every time. That’s purposeful efficiency.

What is the purpose of your team? What are the right things for your team to do to support that purpose? What is the right way to do each of those things? There are no set answers, but if you consistently strive to determine the best answers for yourself to each of these questions you will get better and better at purposeful efficiency.

Dan Coughlin: What role does having a compelling dream play in building a great team?

Terry Michler: The dream for any season is part of the common goal we all share. We were ranked 9th in the country at the beginning of the season. I didn’t know that, but my players told me. The reason I knew they knew is because of the way they played, if you know what I mean. (Now he’s laughing.) They weren’t concentrating on what was happening on the field.

The goal for all of my teams has been to win the state championship. We have a star on our uniform for every state championship we’ve won in soccer at CBC. Next season the players will have seven stars on their uniforms. Our goal every year is to add a star. The more mature the

team is, the more we talk about the dream. If the group is not that mature, then I only talk about the dream occasionally and in more of an indirect way.

This year's team was very mature. I told them, "I'm demanding more of you because of what we're capable of. If I don't demand more of you, then I will fail at my responsibilities." With this year's team, if I told them they could have a day off from practice, they would say, "That's fine. Leave us the soccer balls so we can practice on our own." It's all about managing performance in relation to expectations, having a core plan and allowing for some leeway as is necessary. Then develop the plan over time through repeated practice with careful observation never far off.

I learned from an old English coach about goal setting. He said that there are three different types of goals: a security goal, a realistic goal, and a barrier-breaking goal. A security goal is achieving what you know you can do. A realistic goal is one you know you can achieve if you play at your best, but you have to be at your best to achieve it. A barrier-breaking goal is one you may never achieve, but you want to pursue it anyway.

If you only have security goals, then that saps your energy. You don't have anything to get your competitive juices flowing. As long as you always have a barrier-breaking goal, it keeps the passion going.

Management Insight: Great teams have dreams, especially barrier-breaking dreams. What is your group going after? What is it that will get the juices flowing and keep the flame of passion alive? Even if you've been with your group for a long time it's still important to find realistic and barrier-breaking goals to spur your group on.

Dan Coughlin: How do you evaluate your team's performance?

Terry Michler: I do it a few ways both for the team as a whole and for each player that gets into the game. Every game we have ten goals, some are objective and some are subjective. They are:

1. Play as though we're down by three goals at the start of the game.
2. Score the first goal.
3. Score the second goal in the next ten minutes.
4. Get a shutout.
5. Win both halves.
6. Play as though it were the state final game.
7. Defend, build up the attack creatively, and finish.
8. Keep the opponent to less than 10 shots.
9. Score two second half goals.
10. Overcome the 0-3 start by outscoring the opponent by more than three goals.

After the game, I let them know how they did on those ten goals. I also post my positive comments on the game and my areas of concern.

Then I rate the team's performance for each game on a scale from 10 to 1 where:

10 is brilliant
9 is outstanding
8 is excellent

7 is solid
6 is adequate
5 is fair
4 is below average
3 is poor
2 is lousy
1 is embarrassing

Over the course of the season I connect the dots for each game rating so the players can see the trends we are on as a team. I can also look back at any team I've coached and see the trends that happened during their particular season. All of this helps me to improve my insight and my understanding of what needs to be done.

On an individual basis I also give each player that got into the game a rating on the same 10 to 1 scale and I write a comment about each player's performance in that game. Also, before the season I have each player take a psychological profile test. The results of that test help me to understand the individual's personal needs. I go over the results with each player to help him better understand himself.

Management Insight: CBC plays over 30 varsity soccer games every year. Notice the incredible commitment Terry makes to evaluate the group's performance as a whole and the performance of each individual within the group. I was impressed by the honesty of Terry's evaluations. When I looked at his ratings for all the games in one season over half of them were "adequate" or "below adequate". The team that year won over 80% of his games. Just because his team won a very high percentage of the games didn't mean he rated all those games as outstanding or brilliant.

Think about your group. Are you investing the right amount of time in evaluating what has just happened and letting the members of the group know your thoughts on their performance both collectively and individually? Are you being honest in your evaluations about what really happened or are you giving evaluations based on what other people said about the performance?

Dan Coughlin: Do have any barrier-breaking goals for yourself?

Terry Michler: One of my barrier-breaking goals is to know as much about soccer and to be as good at explaining it to my players as the Dutch coaches. 12 years ago I was this far away. (He holds his hands very far off apart.) Now I'm maybe this far apart. (He moves his hands 50% closer.) I've closed the gap considerably between what I know about soccer and what the coaches in Holland know. I may never get completely there, but that's what motivates me. It's an internal, subjective dream that I have, but it keeps me motivated.

Management Insight: You need to find a way to keep your passion alive in order to do the same for your group. What is some meaningful, barrier-breaking goal that you have for yourself?

Dan Coughlin: In your book you talk about the importance of playing with a certain style that emphasizes a precise, creative attacking approach to every game. This is a style you really learned in great detail from the Dutch coaches. Why is this style so important?

Terry Michler: Confidence and control!!! When you can play in such a way that the other team struggles to keep up, you have a distinct advantage. Soccer is a game determined by your ability to use the ball; thus ball possession and attacking with ball possession give you that advantage. Some teams practice possession soccer, but they don't play attacking ball possession soccer. In soccer, ball possession is NEVER an end product; it is the MEANS to the end. As the Dutch would say, the key is ball possession in order to build a controlled attack that leads to goals. Not merely ball possession for the sake of ball possession – that does NOT lead to goals.

The confidence factor was evident in the final game as our team played in a way that looked like they were having fun in a championship game before 5,000 people against a team that had beaten us twice previously during the season. Our players were “on their game” and it showed, and they were enjoying the moment. The training in the week leading up to the final game was intended to produce that effect -- we emphasized quick, clean ball possession with the end result always going to goal. The players were well rehearsed in how they were to play, and they played a near perfect game.

Creative individualism within a team framework is the ultimate challenge to conquer. We did it as the final game showed. We had players who were dominating in their individual performances, both in the attack and in defense, but it was also in the performance of the team. As I have said previously, the better players have a responsibility to do more, that's just their roles, nothing more, nothing less – with no unnecessary fanfare.

The team framework must include the individual qualities of the players – as you put together your playing concept, it must be a combination of both team and individual, blended in the best way possible to enhance a maximum performance.

Management Insight: An attacking, ball possession style is exactly what the best businesses in the world use. They maintain possession of the ball by taking great care of their current customers. That keeps them in the game. But they don't settle for just keeping their current customers by doing really well what they've always done. They also probe for ways to create and deliver more value to their customers and their potential customers. This attacking mentality is how they expand their lead. They challenge themselves to come up with innovative products and services that add more value to their desired customers and move their results forward in a sustainable and profitable way.

Great managers foster creative individualism within the framework of the organization. They empower their employees to make decisions on their own by giving them freedom within the framework of the organization's values and purpose. They want creative, daring employees who are willing to take on the responsibility of creating and delivering continually greater value for customers and prospects.

Dan Coughlin: You talk a lot about the importance of observation in your book. You also talk about the importance of not yelling out instructions to players during the game. Why is observation so important in terms of generating a great team performance?

Terry Michler: Observation, to me, is what separates the different levels of expertise. Some people see some things, other people see everything. Some people can see things almost before they happen!

I once attended a coaching clinic and the presenter was a US coach of the highest order - a professional coach in our professional league - and he started the session by talking about a

painting. He said that most people could acknowledge the painting for what it was and what it presented, but a very few, when looking at it from a slightly different approach, would see “a cat in the picture.” They were able to see more in the picture because of their ability to observe in a different and more detailed manner.

When people watch a game, they all see it in their own way. Most see it like the plot in a novel, simply re-telling what happened. But the gifted observer will see the same game in a different way, much like knowing the theme in a novel, as opposed to the plot.

When I attended the Coaching Symposium in Holland in 1997, we learned that one of the biggest precepts of Dutch Soccer is Match Analysis. The very first day we arrived we went to a professional game, and we were paired with another member of our group. Each pair was given a specific assignment to observe and report on the following day. The assignments were quite limited, but they progressively increased with each additional game that we observed.

I was totally overwhelmed by the detail that went into the observation of our instructors – as we saw the “plot,” they saw the “theme.” As we continued watching more games, we gradually drifted away from the plot and started closing in on the theme. Today, as I observe games, I “see the cat” and I am all about the theme. Thus, the story of the game unfolds differently to the casual observer than it does to the trained observer. It’s all about what you are looking at, and looking for. It’s the perspective that you take and then it becomes how you apply it.

Observe, embrace and apply. In the preparation for the championship game, I had the chance to observe our opponent a few weeks earlier in their District Final game. Having already played them twice, I knew enough about them already, but I wanted to fine-tune my final observation and only focused on them in a game that was evenly contested and decided by a single goal. Had they lost that game, my day would have been totally wasted, but that was not to be.

So, as a result of that day’s final observation, I applied the information into an action plan for the state championship, hoping against hope that we would be in that game and that they would be our opponent. As luck would have it, that’s exactly how it turned out, and the plan was good and the execution of it by the players was perfect.

Management Insight: Spend much more of your time observing your employees in action than telling them what to do. Far too often I’ve seen a boss come in and tell a group all the things they are doing wrong without having been in the meeting at all. Talk about deflating people and simultaneously ruining your credibility with your employees. Individuals will be much more open to hearing what you have to say if they know your comments are based on careful observation.

Observe your customers and your competition as well. Always search for a better understanding of what your customers want and/or need. Your observations can help to improve the current delivery of value and it can increase the chances of coming up with a new product or service that will really be a breakthrough value for your customers and prospects. Carefully study your competition as well. Perhaps they have an area of weakness that you can quickly convert to your organization’s advantage. Maybe they are doing something simple that is remarkably effective. Is there a way that your organization can deploy the same idea?

Dan Coughlin: Terry, you teach a free 8-week, 16-class course in the summertime on coaching soccer for coaches at all levels throughout St. Louis that anyone can attend. Why do you do that? You’re giving away for free an incredible amount of information you’ve gathered over your career.

Terry Michler: If I have something that is of value to other people, I'm happy to share it with them. I always told myself when I was a young coach that if I ever got a chance to travel to other countries and learn about soccer that I would share everything I learned with anyone who wanted to listen. Plus when I'm discussing the game with other coaches I always learn something. When I'm teaching Spanish at CBC I always tell my students, "I'm here today to see what I can learn from you."

Management Insight: If you really want to strengthen your skill as a manager, be willing to share everything you've learned with anyone who wants to listen. Get other managers together and discuss the various approaches people use to set a strategy, influence others, develop an action plan, improve execution, build relationships with customers, and on and on.

Dan Coughlin: What is the difference between you as a coach in 2009 and you as a coach in 1994 and in 1979?

Terry Michler: At each stage, I did what I thought I needed to do. However, you have to be able to adapt to the changes. In time, you should mellow. 30 years ago I would really be upset if I didn't get through everything on my practice schedule. Today if I have four things scheduled to practice and I only get through three of them, I'm totally okay with that. 30 years ago I would lay out the practice schedule for the whole season in terms of when we would practice certain things. Today I would never do that. I adapt each practice to the needs of the team at each given moment.

Kids were much more independent 30 years ago. I could give them a ball and say "Go play," and they would create a game and start playing. Today if I did that the kids wouldn't know what to do. They want me to tell them to run a certain drill a certain way. The people who do a lot of pickup games figure out how to do things on their own. But today's kids are driven to an organized practice and the coach runs them through drills. Their ball skills are better today, but they are not as independent of thinkers as they used to be.

30 years ago coaches got in a player's face. Today that totally doesn't work. You have to present yourself in a way that people can respond to. Sometimes you have to say things you normally wouldn't think to say in order to be effective with people.

Management Insight: To manage a group effectively, you need to understand the group, which includes understanding what approaches will and will not be effective with them at any given moment. Also, notice Terry's insight on what generates independent thinking. If you run every minute of every meeting with your employees, you may end up with stronger technical employees who aren't as good at thinking independently as they can be. Allow your employees the freedom to have conversations on their own where they can independently develop ideas to generate better results as a group.

Dan Coughlin: In terms of winning state championships, your career has had three phases. In your first 16 years you won three state championships. Then you went 16 years without a state championship. In the past six years you've won three more state championships. What were the 16 years in the middle like for you when you didn't win any state championships?

Terry Michler: I started to question myself. I wondered to myself, “Have you just been lucky or what?” But in the end I didn’t get too far away from what I believed in. I stayed with the general approach I always believed in, and I kept working to get better at it.

Management Insight: When times are tough and your desired results are not rolling in, stick with your basic principles and beliefs while simultaneously always searching for ways to improve your approach to your team and to improving results.

Dan Coughlin: The 2009 State Championship was the single finest soccer game I’ve ever seen a team play at any level including college and professional. It was also one of the greatest group performances I’ve ever seen in business, entertainment, athletics, and education. What did you say to your team after the game?

Terry Michler: Here’s a portion of what I wrote to the team the day after the game,

Boys,

I want to thank you for the wonderful season and the beautiful Final game. The Final represented a culmination of everything that we did and everything that we were about this past season. It all came together in one glorious game, where we demonstrated in so many ways, why we are the Champions. Welcome to a very exclusive group – a group that has in common the successful completion of a desired goal that is shared by many, but achieved by a very few. The memories will never leave you, nor will they ever diminish – they are yours to treasure for the rest of your lives.

Welcome also into the history of CBC Soccer and St. Louis High School Soccer. You have left a permanent and lasting mark that will be there forever – you have stamped your greatness along with others of deserving status. People will applaud you for the result, but they should also applaud the process of what it took to reach that goal.

As a coach, I will always remember the Final as a special moment because so much was riding on the outcome and so much came together to produce the all-time best game possible. When we met on Saturday morning to discuss the tactics for the game, I had a good feeling that everyone shared in the idea and thought that it was the best way to play. Part two was to play it on the field – it was as close to a perfect game as I could have ever imagined. But maybe more important to me was how maturely you approached and played the game – there were so many great efforts and wonderful plays that it seemed that the game was easy and fun for you, even though it was a Championship game played before 5,000 people. We asked you to relax and enjoy the moment, have fun, and do your best -- that is just what you did and your performance was awesome. You played to a Championship level, thus deserving to be recognized for the Champions that you are. I am sad to see it all end, but could not be happier for the way that it ended. Every one of you is a special part of this success and everyone together made it happen.

Thanks for the memories -- I have truly been blessed to be able to be a part of this with you.

Management Insight: Notice how Terry reinforces the importance of a shared vision and the process necessary to make the vision a reality. He’s not only celebrating the victory but also the journey it took to get there. He’s actually teaching the players the formula for generating success later in life. When you celebrate a great success with your team reinforce for them what it took to make the success a reality.

About Terry Michler

Visit Terry at www.cbcdutchtouch.com. As the Varsity Head Soccer Coach at CBC High School for 39 years, Terry's record is 809-199-96. He has the most wins of any high school soccer coach in U.S. history. His teams have won six state championships, finished second six times, and have appeared in 16 Final Fours. He has been named National Coach of the Year twice.

Dutch soccer has been his influence for the past 30 plus years. It has shaped his mentality and approach to the game in general and to coaching and training specifically. In April of 1997, he attended a 10-day Coaching Symposium in Zeist, The Netherlands. Zeist is the headquarters of the KNVB, the governing body of Dutch soccer. He experienced first-hand the Dutch culture and mentality toward soccer as he had access to facilities, training and matches of the top teams in Holland, youth through first team. As a coach, his ambition is to have his teams play in the Dutch way.

He is the founder of the **CBC Dutch Touch International Soccer Program** for coaches and players. It is the best way for him to spread the Dutch Vision and to share what he has learned over the years about Dutch football. He is the author of three books: **Coaching Soccer Champions** (World Class Coaching), **Full Season Training Program – CBC High School 2005** (WCC), and **Dutch Total Football** (WCC).

About Dan Coughlin

Visit Dan at www.thecoughlincompany.com. Dan is a student and teacher of practical processes that improve business performance. His purpose is to work with executives and managers so they achieve great performances. He defines a great management performance as significantly improving an organization's highest priority desired outcomes in a sustainable way.

Dan is a business thought leader, keynote speaker, management consultant, and author of three books on management performance, including his newest, **The Management 500: A High-Octane Formula for Business Success** (AMACOM 2009), which has been endorsed by Jason Jennings, Marshall Goldsmith, and Brian Tracy. Dan's clients include Coca-Cola, Abbott, Toyota, Prudential, Boeing, Marriott, McDonald's, Denny's, St. Louis Cardinals, and more than 150 other organizations.