LEGACY

THE LEADERSHIP LESSONS OF THE ALL BLACKS

WHITEPAPER

NOTES FROM THE FINANCIAL SERVICES AND COMMODITIES TECHNOLOGY BREAKFAST WITH JAMES KERR
The seventh financial services and commodities technology breakfast saw over 150 leaders in the sector meet and connect in the historic surrounds of Ironmongers’ Hall in the City. Our events programme over the last eighteen months has seen some exceptional speakers cover many different aspects of leadership, talent and performance. We have seen how polar explorers, bomb disposal experts, Olympians, SAS commanders, fast jet pilots, sportsmen, authors, journalists and psychologists can all give us lessons that we can port into our businesses.

This session saw a keynote from the author of the exceptional book Legacy, James Kerr. In 2010 James became one of the only ever people to be allowed inside the camp of the New Zealand All Blacks, the most successful sporting team in history. What he found was 15 lessons that can be translated into any high performance team be it sport, military or business. The book has been an immediate best-seller and impacted organisations all over the world. James has been asked to speak internationally and consult with many of the world’s leading organisations on the back of his findings. Indeed, shortly after finishing his talk with us, he was flown to the US by the Navy Seals who were keen to learn more about his work with the All Blacks.

James is an exceptional story teller and this paper will endeavour to cover some of the key takeaways from the session. Legacy quotes 15 lessons from the All Blacks.

There are:
1. Sweep the Sheds
2. Go for the Gap
3. Play with Purpose
4. Pass the Ball
5. Create a Learning Environment
6. No Dick Heads
7. Embrace Expectations
8. Train to Win
9. Keep a Blue Head
10. Know Thyself
11. Sacrifice
12. Invent a Language
13. Ritualize to Actualize
14. Be a Good Ancestor
15. Write your Legacy

The great thing about Legacy is that it is extremely readable with a plethora of amazing stories about All Black culture. It makes easy reading and absolute common sense. Rather than simply paraphrase the chapters, this paper will look at some of the themes that arrived on the day. If you haven’t yet read the book in full, it is a must read.

You can order it here
http://www.amazon.co.uk/Legacy-James-Kerr/dp/147210353X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1410532092&sr=8-1&keywords=james+kerr+legacy
The New Zealand rugby team is THE iconic team in sports history. There are very few teams that even have a chance of coming close to their continued and sustained success for over 100 years. The US men’s basketball team has a shout. An argument could have been made for the Brazil football team prior to the world cup. Manchester United in the premier league, Liverpool in Europe, Real Madrid, Barcelona, Bayern Munich could all create claims. None, however, can boast quite the record of the mighty All Blacks.

To give some context, the All Blacks have played 519 games winning 396, giving them an astonishing 76.3% win ratio. They have only ever lost 38 games at home. The great rugby playing nations of the Scots and Irish have never beaten them. The incredible thing is that they are getting better. Since 2004, that ratio has got even better rising to 87%. Since 2012 it is up to 91.18%. In their last 22 games it is up to 98% after they drew with Australia just a few weeks ago. That equalled their own record for the most consecutive wins in rugby history. In 2013, they won every single game.

Perhaps even more impressive is the fact that they are only a nation of 4.4m people. They have only 137,184 registered rugby players against 2,549,196 in England and 632,184 in South Africa. Their success against the odds is of Spartan proportions. They march on in their quest to defend their crown and win their 3rd rugby world cup in 2015, having swept aside South Africa, Argentina and Australia in recent weeks. They currently hold every bit of silverware that it is possible for them to hold.

Despite all of this, in 2004 the All Blacks had become a team that the people in the group no longer wanted to be a part of. They had sunk to a low where they were put into recovery positions by the South African team who had just beaten them after a drink fuelled night out. Change was a necessity and Graham Henry set about stripping out every aspect of the team and re-building the culture, placing a priority on the core values of humility, excellence and respect. The results speak for themselves.

Legacy looks at the All Blacks in depth from a deeply personal, internal view. The fifteen chapters perfectly illustrate how the incredible success of the team has transpired and can be replicated in your business. To paraphrase, the secret, to me, would seem to centre around three key pillars:

1. CULTURE
2. CHARACTER
3. EMPOWERMENT

We’ll now look at each of these individually.
Peter Drucker once famously said that “culture eats strategy for breakfast.” This cornerstone of the incredible success enjoyed by the New Zealand rugby team certainly supports the claim. As stated above, a cultural change was a priority in 2004. James Kerr started his keynote by stating that the “sound of the Haka is the sound of the earthquake.” Culture, ritual and mantras have long been a part of New Zealand culture yet the team had disconnected with the story told in their traditional pre-match challenge. Graham Henry brought in an expert to re-write the Haka and Kapa O Pango was born in 2005, reflecting far more the new cultural background of the team. Here it is in its full glory ahead of the 2011 world cup final:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nrkvpi9lU5k

Graham Henry looked at a team that were still performing at a comparatively high standard and realised that change was a priority. The first part of this was to look at the culture of the team. Henry’s vision was to create a values based, vision led, purpose driven team that were playing for something far bigger than themselves.

Reading Richie McCaw’s outstanding autobiography, the story is echoed. The All Blacks are playing for more. They are playing to leave the shirt in a better place. They are playing to be great All Blacks. They are playing to protect a legacy. Higher meaning leading to higher purpose. This powerful vision and purpose is aligned to rock solid values of excellence, humility and respect that underlie all that they do. Similar to Bill Walsh and his legendary San Francisco 49ers team, the All Blacks leadership team felt that getting the base line culture and values right would mean that the score takes care of itself.

The team has looked to create a sustainable culture of success by creating a learning culture that allows you to be the best that you can be. The six pillars that they identified to work on were:

1. SKILLS
2. STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING
3. NUTRITION
4. GAME AWARENESS
5. MENTAL STRENGTH
6. TEAM
The final two on this list is where so much of the focus was centred. The being of team became central along with the we, not me mentality that served the likes of Phil Jackson and his Chicago Bulls and Vince Lombardi’s Packers so well. Very few teams in the corporate world take time to really focus on the team. Those that do perform well above the average in their markets. Sir Clive Woodward spoke in his book Winning about taking everything out of your house and only putting back in what was necessary and needed. This is exactly what Graham Henry was able to do in his thorough review of the team. Taking the time to review any organisation in this way can bring spectacular findings yet often we fail to put our heads above the parapet.

Once the vision was in place and the values agreed, the team looked to make culture a competitive advantage. They focussed on authenticity and creating an environment that people wanted to be a part of. This manifested itself both in building a culture of excellence where people were supported to be the very best that they could be but also little touches such as allowing the team to have a beer in their club colours to bond together as a unit. Players began to feel that they would be able to maximise their ability by playing for something bigger than themselves.

For the All Blacks, the soft stuff was the hard stuff. Skills, strength and nutrition were easy. Mental strength, vision, values and purpose somewhat more different. Their commitment to excellence in these fields have been key. The 2013/2014 All Blacks are not the biggest in rugby. They do, however, continue to win in the final minutes (see Ireland 2013 and the 3 games against England in 2014) by consistent mental strength and a performance focus that has culturally become very much a part of who they are. Much of this can be attributed to a decade of conditioning, taking lessons and learning all the way.

The All Blacks had developed a very unwanted reputation since 1987 for choking in the big games. They would enter nearly every World Cup as the number one ranked team in the world but constantly fall short. In 2011, they smashed the French 8-7! In Legacy and Richie McCaw’s book you can see that a learning culture was central to this victory. They still aren’t quite there as their recent draw to Australia showed, but the one team in world rugby that focusses on process and performance right up until the final minute to snatch victory from defeat is the All Blacks. Results are everything to them but the performance is the critical factor. Again in business, results far too often trump process and pressure means that people veer away from what actually makes them successful. They looked to take a vision and execute the strategy repeatedly. A culture focussed on performance sets a very strong foundation for success. Again, the score takes care of itself.
PERFORMANCE = CAPABILITY X BEHAVIOUR

Once the culture is set, James speaks of the need to “ritualize to actualize.” Ritual, imagery, metaphor and language are powerful parts of the All Black culture, re-enforcing key messages throughout the team. This can be ported directly into the corporate world. Saatchi & Saatchi has “nothing is impossible” embedded in the stone steps outside their offices. When you enter the building you cross the threshold into a place where anything is possible. Wal-Mart have a Saturday morning meeting that dates back 50 years ritualising knowledge sharing and collective endeavour. This creates a powerful belief system.

Alongside rituals, language and words create revolutions. There is an outstanding narrative and central vocabulary synonymous with many elite performing organisations. The US Marines talk about honour, courage and commitment. Apple speak of Empathy, Focus and Impute. The All Blacks would regularly use power words such as outstanding, accuracy, clarity, world class and red hot. They brought in mantras such as champions do extra, the Black plague, better people make better All Blacks etc. Language that becomes a competitive advantage and almost a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Through a clarity of vision, a compelling purpose, living values, a culture focussed on performance, learning and excellence, and the clever use of narrative and rituals, the All Blacks have built an enviable record of success. All of this is absolutely transferrable to any environment.

James Kerr puts it colourfully as one of the chapters in the book – No Dickheads. The All Blacks are selected on character over skills alone. The same is said of the SAS as we found out in Floyd Woodrow’s recent talk. It is a constant theme through all of the great teams and leaders we have studied through our breakfast programme. Unequivocally, in all of the teams that we have spoken to the team comes first. This is absolutely the case in the modern day All Blacks.

Better people make better All Blacks. As James said, if they make better All Blacks then they also make better brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, CEOs, salesman, and programmers. The cultural re-design ensured that, to quote Jim Collins, the journey started with the right people on the bus and in the right seat and the wrong people off the bus. James spoke of a meeting finishing and senior members of the team including Dan Carter, Nonu, Thorn etc picking up brooms and “sweeping the sheds.” No-one looks after the All Blacks, the All Blacks look after themselves. A prime example of the humility that they so regularly display.

They looked for people who matched their ambition to continuously improve. Richie McCaw, their on-field leader espousing this like no other, constantly writing to himself in his Warwick notebook, leaving himself challenges in his quest to become a GAB (Great All Black).
Mana (authority and respect) became sacrosanct. Humility has been one of their most sought after traits. Ubuntu, the desire to make a ripple in the pond and to make a positive influence on everyone that you meet became regularly spoken of. Ubuntu has strong echoes of the successful Proteas South African Cricket Team and was a feature of the Mandela years. Successful businesses are more and more taking their opportunity to leave their ripple in the pond. Zappos, Apple, Toms shoes and many more have seen that giving back and giving rather than taking can create huge brand loyalty, both from an internal and external perspective.

The team understand sacrifice. As part of their initiation on winning a cap, new players will be tapped on the shoulder by legends of the game and asked two questions:

■ What do you bring to the team?
■ What are you prepared to sacrifice?

The questions show where a focus is placed on the character of the new members of the team.

They select people who want to be better and to learn everything from their skills to their heads. Gilbert Enoka is the mental skills coach of the team. His job has been to build strength and character throughout the squad. The core team of Enoka, Wayne Smith, Steve Hansen and Graham Henry have been instrumental in building that core strength throughout the team. The mental strength and character of the team has been championed throughout the rugby world but it has been worked on through necessity. The use of NLP anchoring was apparent in the 2011 final with Kieran Read slapping the team on the back reminding them to return to their “blue heads”. There are triggers to get them to think clearly under pressure such as Richie McCaw stamping his foot to get grounded. Mental strength is a core aspect of character. The All Blacks have worked hard to build in bucket loads. Very few companies are still looking at this aspect of performance. Should we be doing more to get the heads right of the sales teams, tech teams, leadership teams et al?

The concept of Legacy throughout the team is extremely powerful. James spoke with passion about Jonas Salt who invented the vaccine to cure polio. He felt that it was important to “plant trees that you will never see” and to “write your own legacy.” The All Blacks are all looking to “leave the shirt in a better place.” Our responsibility is to make the very most of the time when the sun is shining on our moment. In business, are we doing enough to make our own mark? Are we able to leave a legacy and leave the industry in a better place for what we have achieved? If we can connect our business purpose to this and attract people with the character and determination to leave their mark, then maybe great things can be achieved.

Legacy, humility, mana, sacrifice, Ubuntu and no dickheads. All common characteristics of the great All Blacks who have dominated the sport.
In the military, the Red Arrows and many outstanding teams, the mission command model prospers. The All Blacks are no exceptions. Graham Henry and Steve Hansen have become masters at creating ownership and autonomy throughout their teams. A feature of the great teams have been the strength of their great leadership groups. All international teams have the ability to create strong, player driven leadership yet few teams achieve it. England’s 2003 World Cup winning team had leaders throughout. Back, DellaGio, Vickery, Tindall, Wilkinson, Hill, Leonard and more all matured at the same time to support Johnson. It was a perfect leadership storm. The All Blacks have consistently achieved this for years.

The leadership group is given genuine ownership and inclusion. The management team will start the week giving the strategy to execute. Responsibility is then handed to the team and by the end of the week a team talk is barely necessary. This sort of empowerment is brave but hugely successful. Leaders create leaders, they pass the ball. They create ownership through inclusion and James affirmed that people will rise to the challenge as long as it is their challenge.

A common feature of high performance organisations is co-creation where the team are invited to be included in shaping the strategy and the purpose is personalised to attach “personal meaning to a public purpose.” The senior players are given responsibility to live and drive the standards. Explaining your failure to live the standards to your peers as opposed to being chastised again by the boss is a far more powerful motivator. No-one wants to let the team down.

This empowerment is a key to ensuring the difficult decisions are made in volatile and uncertain times with no hesitation. The team are trusted to execute by the management. That trust builds confidence that results in ownership and in turn outstanding results.

They are hugely committed to “training to win.” They will train the theory, workshop the strategy, test under pressure and then review and amend. As with the SAS, there is rarely a situation in combat that they haven’t trained for already. They have task clarity and role clarity. They know their job and are trusted by peers and management to deliver. When they are in game situations they rarely disappoint because they are empowered to succeed to an optimum level.

They De-Brief with incredible skill. They believe in a philosophy of “stabbing in the front not the back.” They have developed a culture where there is no blame and people actively seek criticism and feedback. Because they are empowered they trust. Because they trust they can feedback with accuracy and no fear. Because they de-brief with quality they grow and they improve every time. It is a blueprint for operational excellence.

It is not luck that has created more “leaders” than any other team in sporting history. The All Blacks understand what so many elite performing organisations instinctively get – if you include people in the strategy, set clear expectations, allow them to perform, de-brief thoroughly and support throughout, then great mountains can be moved.
Whilst the All Blacks seem untouchable to many, their success is remarkably simple. The messages from Legacy and the talk delivered by James Kerr are absolute common sense. As the man himself said, however, there is a huge divide between common sense and common practice.

It would be easy to go back to our day jobs and carry on doing the same thing. The lessons from Legacy are, however, transformational. Our challenge is to build a culture that means high performance in our results is inevitable. It is to establish the character in our organisations that becomes the true and consistent personality of the team. We must look at language, rituals and mantras to support our narrative. We must trust, empower and give autonomy to our teams.

Time spent looking at this and really focusing on the lessons we have learnt from the incredible All Blacks can bring enormous dividend. We’d love to talk more about this and please do get in touch should you wish to be put in contact with James himself. He has been working with the world’s biggest companies for many years looking at their story and brand, helping them grow and echo the success of the All Blacks. We hope that you take as much benefit from him as we have.

Many thanks for all who joined us on the day. For those unable to make it, please do get in touch to book your place on November 25th to learn the secrets of the Red Arrows with the former leader Jas Hawker and the Mission Excellence team. More details can be found to follow.

We look forward to seeing you soon.

Toby

You can buy a copy of Legacy here
http://www.amazon.co.uk/Legacy-James-Kerr/dp/147210353X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1410532092&sr=8-1&keywords=james+kerr+legacy
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For more information, please contact:
Toby Babb at Harrington Starr

T: 0203 587 7007
F: 0207 022 1750
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