

John Deffenbaugh blog – Looking after the troops

Dave Brailsford has been in the news recently. If you've been on planet zog, you will have missed that he's performance director of Team GB Cycling. Results speak louder than words, but let me draw out a few key ones in this blog.

First, the **framework** for his success. Brailsford lays out the following key factors:

- Riders – having the talent to get the job done
- Commitment – attitude to stay the course and personal resilience
- Analysis – dissection of riders and what it will take for them to win
- Prioritise – focusing on what is really important
- Plan – as it says on the box
- Execute – aim to achieve the marginal gain at each step

On the surface, this is no brainer stuff. Many other teams probably have the same framework – but not the 8 gold medals, even though they all race on round wheels. Top Leaders could probably draw up this list in their sleep. But what makes the difference? There are a few key lessons that Top Leaders can learn from what is underneath this framework.

Behind the riders are **three groups**:

1. Brailsford – he sees himself as the conductor of the orchestra
2. Coaches – you will have seen them jump up and down
3. 'Secret squirrels' – the technology folk tasked with thinking and applying out of the box

Brailsford brings to mind the statement by George Bernard Shaw that Robert Kennedy made the cornerstone of his '68 campaign: **Some look at things that are, and ask why? I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?** This seems to be the way Brailsford has approached the decade-long task that has resulted in these golds. You can picture the conversation: "I'll see you Beijing and raise you". The rules conspiring against Team GB, other countries improving too, the expectation of a country. And still the results came, equal if not better.

Coaches played their part big time. As a coach myself I sometimes wonder what my impact is. There is no doubting it here. Brailsford pays homage to his coaches as the power behind the throne. As a Top Leader, do you have a coach? It's too easy to not have the time, inclination or want to send the dosh. But think of the riders and what they have gained. Gold.

Then there are the **'secret squirrels'**, as Brailsford refers to his tech people. I realised the value of cycling technology when I finished my first Highland Cross. 30 miles on a clapped out mountain bike after a 20 mile run along sheep tracks made me see the value of a racer. 10 Crosses later I haven't looked back. The French have been critical of Team GB's innovations, but Brailsford pointed out that they use French wheels, and that they're round. And it's the marginal gains that come from this innovation that makes the difference. It's a real shame that the I for innovation in QIPP is so undervalued. Just look at what it can achieve.

Finally, what struck me was the small stuff Brailsford talked about. Brailsford highlighted as detail the lessons given to riders about **hand washing** and what **pillows** they use. Wow, that is detail. But look at the results that come from the aggregation of marginal gains. The pacesetting style can come in handy here, as long as it's combined with other styles such as visioning, coaching and participative. What detail do you see around your place that can give some marginal gain???

Which leaves us with the riders. They only have to cross the finish line, preferably first. But they're sure looked after. Do you do this for your staff? For yourself?

John Deffenbaugh
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