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Take Your Genius to the Super Bowl: Wisdom and Youth

Lessons from the playoffs to take to the championship game

[John Hoover](#) | Jan 23rd 2015 11:12AM



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It's the lull before the storm--the middle week between the divisional playoffs and the world championship of United States football. Take time to reflect. You're supposed to be thinking about business, but you want to think about football. So, why not think about both? Think about what it takes to win the big one in business or sports. What does it take to come off as the genius and not the chump?

According to playwright Edgar Lee Masters, "Genius is wisdom and youth." What happened when wisdom met youth in Foxboro? What happened when youth met wisdom in Seattle? In Foxboro, wisdom ate youth's lunch from kickoff to the final clock tick of the fourth quarter. In Seattle, wisdom ate youth's lunch and laid down for a nap with time still on the clock.

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The plan for the truly wise championship game or successful business strategy just might come out of the playbook professor and corporate consultant, John Kotter, wrote at Harvard--just a Hail Mary away from Gillette stadium.

In 1995, Kotter published a Harvard Business Review article about leading change and why many

change efforts fail. Kotter's eight-step change model, now used the world over, could help either Super Bowl team win.

Step One: Establish a Sense of Urgency. This seems pretty straight forward when 60 minutes of playing time is all that is between you at kickoff and spending the next 12 months as the champions of the world or an also ran.

Step Two: Create a Guiding Coalition. This is not so straight forward. The team with the best leadership wins. Right? Sometimes teams loaded with talent win despite less-than-stellar leadership. Sometimes less talented teams win because of superior leadership. Teams loaded with talent and solid leadership are unstoppable.

Step Three: Develop Clear Vision. Read this as a game plan. Obviously, the better the plan, the better your chance to win. You want to zig when your opponent zags. You want your strength lined up against your opponent's weakness. That requires study and strategy. The brain trusts for Seattle and New England are at this moment studying each other down to the color of the cheerleaders' toenail polish.

Step Four: Communicate the Vision. It's a good idea to let the players in on the plan they are executing against. Tell them the play you've called, so to speak. The NFL's version of a blooper reel gets longer every time two or more players wearing the same uniform are running different plays.

Step Five: Empower Others to Act on this Vision. This could be a literal interpretation of giving somebody the ball so he or she can run with it. The commentators say it like this every week, "The plan is to get the ball into the hands of the play maker. Unfortunately in business, being the boss's nephew does not necessarily make you a play maker.

Step Six: Create quick wins. Score early and often. While the team who scores first or last might not win, the team that scores most often probably will. Might as well start early and score late.

Step Seven: Build on the Change. If what you're doing is successful, do more of it. If it's true that you can never be too thin or too rich, you can't go wrong being uber-successful. Don't let go, pour it on, play sideline-to-sideline and whistle-to-whistle.

Step Eight: Institutionalize the Change. Drop anchor. Make it sticky. Grow roots. However you want to say it, make your new and successful way of being is sufficiently grounded so it won't blow away in the first of wind.

The wisdom of youth thing in Glendale, Arizona on February 1, 2015 means the early-striking team must avoid the usual, violation of Step Seven. Every one of Kotter's steps has a flip side. Flip Step One's sense of urgency over like the pre-game coin toss and you'll see lack of urgency, wandering minds, lost focus, even laziness in the extreme.

Step Seven's de is the dreaded "Declaring victory too soon." That could also mean turning down the heat, eas f the gas, lowering the pressure, calling off the dogs, rushing three, dropping eight into coverag ng down your guard, day dreaming, etc.

The lessons 0 /everyone should take to his or her personal or professional Super Bowl is: "Deploy your stronge nt and help them do their best thinking." "Create the optimal balance between available wis 0 nd available youth." "Do the right things while avoiding doing the wrong things." Don't do the former without doing the latter because, in business or NFL football, a worthy opponent will make you pay for doing the wrong thing. And twelve months is a long time to ponder how much better life would have been if you had only kept Step Seven right side up.

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