

Excerpt from Bochy Ball Book Chapter 2

It's all about chemistry. And, as with any organization that rises to greatness, the formula is complex. But, leadership is always an indispensable part of the mix.

He “Gets” Leadership

Somewhere in our first couple of years of working with Bochy it dawned on us: “We’ve worked with many iconic leaders in our career. Herb Kelleher and Colleen Barrett at Southwest Airlines; Ratan Tata at India’s esteemed Tata Group; Nandan Nilekani, cofounder of Infosys; Rob Katz at Vail Resorts; Graham Weston and Lanham Napier at Rackspace; and General Bill Cooney at USAA, just to name a few. Bochy is as gifted as any CEO I’ve ever met. Intelligence, strategy, creativity, courage, heart, and leadership presence—he’s got the whole package. This guy *gets* leadership.”

In a game that has enough data, statistics, and sabermetrics to tax a supercomputer, you can’t adequately measure these character strengths, and you would certainly be hard-pressed to put a price tag on them. Like all great leaders, Bochy is a blend of many attributes and actions that are paradoxical. His success is anchored in how he manages these paradoxes. Here are a few examples to illustrate his finesse.

Be for your players, but not one of them. Bochy easily puts himself in the shoes of his players and thinks like them because he was one of them. This empathy informs his decisions. Today, he is an integral member of the team, but he is not a player and doesn’t try to be. Approachable and affable, he is relevant to his players, yet he respects their space. He is their greatest advocate and often their toughest critic. He is the general, the commander in chief, but he does not see himself as being above anyone. Players respect him and love playing for him because he strikes a balance. Too much separation and he would be out of touch. Too much of trying to be “one of the guys” and he would compromise his credibility.

Be tough, but not mean. You can’t create a World Series—winning franchise without big expectations, tough discipline, and focused execution. Players will test boundaries. They will evaluate how strong a manager is before they wholeheartedly devote themselves to the vision he sets for the team. They want to know: “Does he have the courage to make tough decisions that are best for the team? Can he stand up to players who are not living the culture? Is he stalwart in looking out for the good of the group?” The problem arises when a leader confuses being tough with being mean. Bochy is not domineering, controlling, or brash. He doesn’t force himself on his coaches or his players. He doesn’t lean on the power of title or pedigree; yet, he’s very much in charge. He demands a lot from his players and coaches. He is tough, but never mean.

Be in control, but let go. In his first few years of managing, Bochy tried to do everything. He quickly learned, however, that he could be in control without controlling everything. Delegating did several things. It gave him more freedom. It connected his coaching staff and made them feel more engaged, more a part of the team. And, it put people who were really good at those things in charge of those things. It *is* paradoxical; he has gained more control by relinquishing it.

Be constrained, but not limited. When you are part of a small-market club like the Padres, you learn to do more with less or you lose big time. We have never heard Bochy complain about payroll constraints. It seems he always considered it a challenge to see what he could do with what he had. When competing against clubs with deep pockets, he seemed to quietly draw from the well of defiance and show the baseball world what his teams could do. Often, his players exceeded the experts’ expectations. Whether it was playing through pain, pushing through self-imposed psychological constraints, or bouncing back when all the prognosticators said it was over, Bochy saw constraints as an opportunity to be more creative and draw more from less.

Be a servant, but not a pushover. The only reason to be in leadership is because you have a desire to serve—to right a wrong, to enrich a condition, to draw the best out of others, to make the world better. Boch intuitively understands this. He would do anything for one of his players or coaches; he has their backs. When his teams play poorly, he doesn't shift blame; he assumes responsibility. When they play well, he doesn't absorb the accolades; he deflects them and gives his players the credit. Players see in Boch an other-centered person who is not weak; he is confident, yet humble. He's no pushover. He's direct and firm, yet compassionate when it comes to telling players the difficult truth. He doesn't shy away from the brutal facts of reality in the media, with his bosses, or with franchise owners either. Boch owns the losses, shares the wins, and handles the rest with dignity and honor.

Know that the more you learn, the less you know. Boch is a lifelong learner who doesn't believe he has arrived. He knows he can learn something from anyone. He also has enough confidence to own his shortcomings, to be vulnerable and grow. He is competitive. If Boch is going to do something, he's going to dig in and do it well. And, he's dedicated to baseball. From his first years as a manager it was clear that he wanted to be a great ambassador for the game. That meant being well-rounded and becoming proficient in those parts of the manager's role that were outside of coaching. In 20-plus years, he has created an impressive body of work and racked up a boatload of experience. But the game has changed dramatically and with those changes come more questions about managing effectively in this new era. The hunt for new and better ways of doing it is what keeps Bochy in the game.

Speak without responding, act without reacting. When you manage 25 different, often eccentric personalities, there is plenty of room for drama. Yet, Boch has had very little of that in his clubhouses. One reason for this is the calming effect he has on his players. He doesn't overreact. If a player is "amped" about something, he doesn't mirror that behavior. Instead, he will just listen and let the fellow get it out, whatever "it" is. Boch intuitively knows that reacting to a situation could exacerbate it. The better part of prudence is often to do nothing and let time play a role.

Great leaders believe that they are there to serve the team—not the other way around.

We've watched him do this with players who said something derogatory or questionable in the media because they were upset about something that happened during a rough game. We knew Boch was ticked. We know how most people would have reacted. But he took a different tack. He took a step back, made sure he had all the facts, reflected on what the player might be thinking. He patiently gave it a day or two before reacting and then he rationally moved to resolve the conflict.

Boch is an action-oriented leader. He's not prone to denial or putting things off because of fear. There is wisdom in his restraint. Boch has often cut cycle time and accelerated conflict resolution by not forcing a situation prematurely.

Be proud, but not arrogant. Boch has always been extremely proud of his players and what he has accomplished as a manager, but he has never been cocky or arrogant. This remains true today, even after winning three World Series titles. He is pleased with what his teams have done for San Francisco; he is equally grateful for what the city, the fans, the front office, and his coaching staff have done for his players. With Boch, it's never been about Boch. Nothing happens in isolation. It's always a collaborative effort.

