



LEADING BLOG

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To Achieve the Extraordinary, Focus on the Game Changers

IN a world of constant change, leaders face relentless pressure to deliver results. Yet the greatest leaders know that true success is not measured only by outcomes, but also by their ability to create conditions for others to thrive and achieve the extraordinary.

Of course, everyone in your organization plays an important role. But there are the very select few who show a truly exceptional talent. They are the ones who have the potential to achieve extraordinary things, who push the whole team further, under the most pressing conditions. They are the ones who are not just satisfied with the status quo on a high level. They are going the furthest, taking the risks that pay off, delivering outstanding performance as a baseline, creating innovative solutions, and inspiring others to level up. It's these special individuals that make you think: If they quit, we've got a real problem!

I call these individuals Game Changers. In my experience, you'll find only a very small percentage among your people. They don't just exceed predetermined targets or goals. They have the potential to deliver consistently exceptional, game-changing performance. However, to reach that level, they need to be recognized, understood, and most of all, led to fully develop. I describe the relationship between a leader and the Game-Changer as a Winning Match.

Here are three essential strategies for leaders when building a Winning Match with Game Changers:

1. Recognize and scout for the qualities that add up to game-changer potential.

Drawing on more than two decades of experience coaching top-tier executives and world-class athletes, I have identified four essential characteristics that define individuals with game-changer potential:

- **Passion:** They are deeply invested in their work — driven by purpose and a relentless hunger to learn, grow, and achieve excellence by continually pushing beyond limits.
- **Desire for Feedback and Input:** They actively seek honest, high-quality feedback and diverse perspectives. They listen with openness, filter insights carefully, and distinguish genuine guidance and useful insights from noise or hidden agendas.
- **Ability to Transform Input into Action:** They embrace change as opportunity for the better. They act quickly on new insights, prepare proactively for changes, and respond with action — decisively, without hesitation.
- **Mental Toughness:** They thrive and deliver their best performance under pressure, sustaining resilience and focus through disciplined habits, intentional recovery, and supportive relationships.

2. Expand your leadership focus: Make your best people even better.

Recognizing what sets Game Changers apart is only the first step. I've seen too many leaders make the mistake of buying into a leadership fallacy that holds entire organizations back: "the best will prevail no matter what."

In reality, many leaders devote most of their time and energy to helping lower achievers meet objectives, while their best people are left to fend for themselves. For Game Changers — the ones that are deeply passionate about their work, and committed the success of the business — being overlooked or taken for granted, or left without specific powerful leadership interactions, can be deeply discouraging. Without intentional and empowering leadership, they may lose motivation, disengage, or even leave.

What they need is a trusted partner — a Leadership Champion — who recognizes their potential, challenges them to stretch further, and supports them in achieving sustained, exceptional performance.

3. Commit to being more than a leader. Aspire to be a Leadership Champion.

To truly tap into the potential of your Game Changers, you must go beyond the traditional management approaches — such as progress reports, routine cadenced reviews, and biannual goal-setting meetings — because it simply can't do justice to the extraordinary potential of Game Changers. They need — and deserve — more. You must unlock potential.

Becoming a Leadership Champion requires a conscious shift in mindset and behavior. Here are three essential shifts that define this leadership transformation:

- **Partner with your Game Changers:** In traditional models, Game Changers are often expected to conform to organizational processes and standards before their true potential can emerge. Instead, once you've identified individuals with game-changer potential, step into the role of a leadership sparring partner — someone who guides them beyond traditional norms. Much like a great coach in sports, a Leadership Champion does not just follow a set program; they're bold enough to inspire and adapt to what best fits the individual strengths and specific needs of their Game Changers.

- Start sparring: The objective of sparring is not to primarily support the other person in finding their solution to fix a situation. It's far more about having an open, productive, and, if necessary, controversial debates to create long-term impact. As the leader, you're the primary sparring partner, bringing your experience, insight, and perspective to the table. Offer your wealth of experience and expertise, and commit to being personally involved in co-creating the decisions that drive extraordinary outcomes.
- Make time for breakthrough discussions and plan for Winning Match moments: Strategically planned Winning Match moments are your dedicated opportunities to connect with your Game Changers. These sessions — ideally every four to six weeks, or more often if urgency demands — should be protected and prioritized. Use this time to deeply explore key strategic topics, address high-impact challenges and activities, and spark new ideas. Together, you'll focus on the areas where your Game Changers can make their greatest contribution, amplifying the exceptional value they already bring to the organization.

When you establish these regular leadership sparring sessions - where you share your knowledge, offer guidance, and open your network, Game Changers begin to see more than a leader. They see your genuine commitment to the overall success, your belief in their role within the organization, and your investment in bringing out the best in them. They recognize your clear ambition to help them reach their full potential.

And then, something remarkable happens: a certain magic emerges in these conversations. That dynamic of trust, challenge, and inspiration becomes the foundation for a true Winning Match.

All in all, a Winning Match represents the ideal combination between a driven individual with game-changer potential and their leader, who acts as their Leadership Champion – engaging in regular, challenging, honest, and deeply supportive interactions. This partnership becomes the cornerstone for creating extraordinary results through your Game Changers.

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