

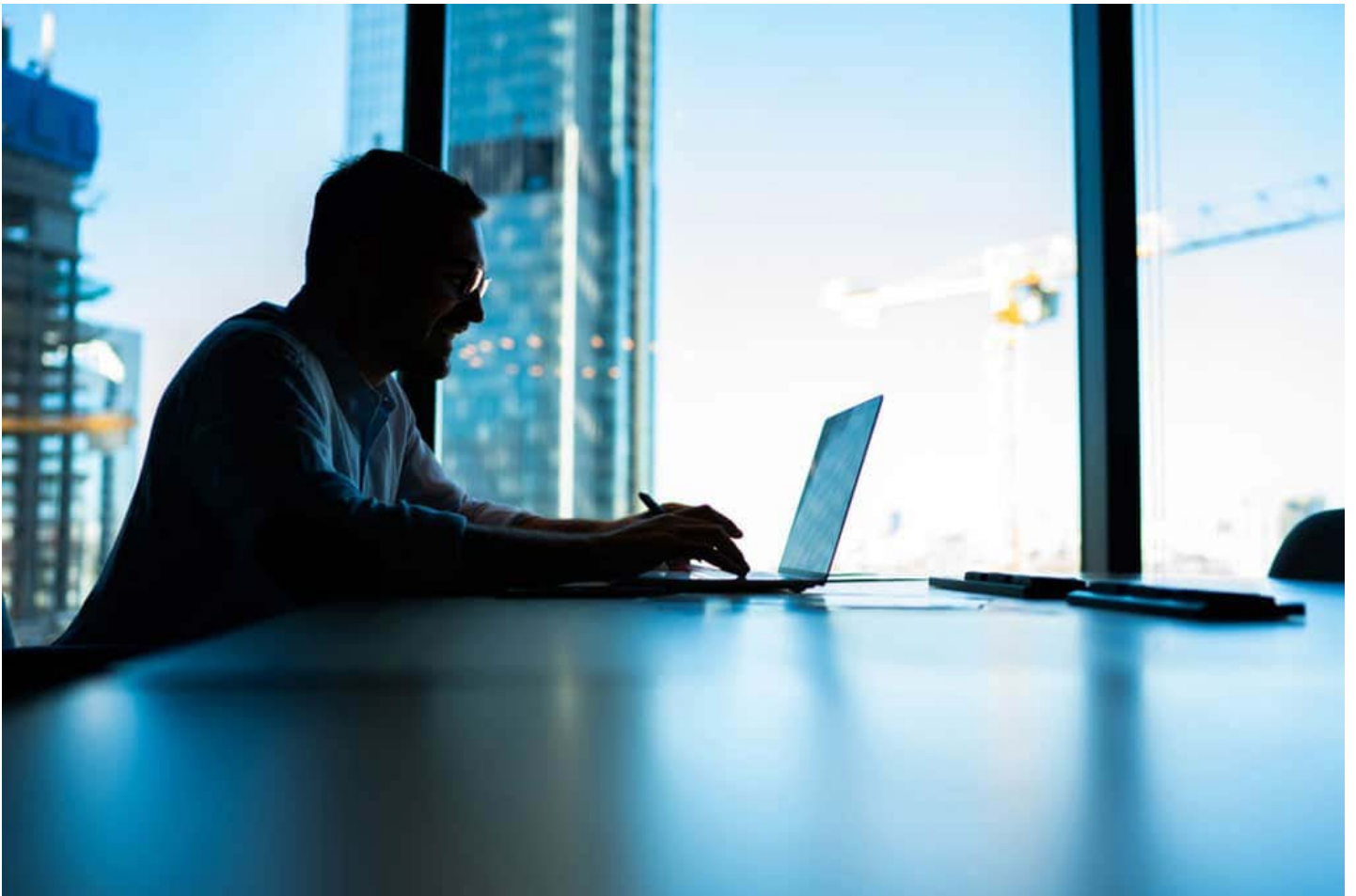


CEO INSIGHTS

# Applying Lessons from Sports to the Business World and Life: 6 Must-Reads

 Lila Jones CEO Insights  November 7, 2024



There's a strong connection between sports and business – from the need for great coaching to building winning teams to leading a win. Sports isn't just a metaphor: it's a parallel – and

certainly in terms of the modern sports industry, what's at stake is just as complex as in any business. Many of us first learn discipline, focus, teamwork, drive and commitment doing sports as kids and that early understanding stays with us.

But lately there's also a new focus on the importance of growth and development not just for employees but for business leaders as well. Given the recent pace of disruption from digital transformations to the pandemic, leaders need to stay on their game. They need all the perspective and wisdom they can get. Who better to learn from but sports and business figures who already understand the crossover and the value of sharing skills and lessons learned? From a winning basketball coach to a high-performance expert, this is wisdom that's well worth the read.

**Success Is the Only Option: The Art of Coaching Extreme Talent** by John Calipari offers a storehouse of expertise, knowledge, and drive in its pages. A top college basketball coach, Calipari led the University of Kentucky's men's basketball team to multiple NCAA Final Four appearances and a national championship. He's a wizard when it comes to recognizing, developing, and managing talent — but extending beyond nurturing each individual to growing the kind of can-do culture where superstars are supporting the team. Leaders need to serve the team, he asserts, and demonstrate the accountability, trust and commitment they want to see in every player. What makes this book especially useful for business applications is Calipari's stress on resilience and mental toughness, along with the flexibility to adapt to change and continuously revise and evolve. It's a book that combines inspiration, empathy, and grit.

1. **[Aim for the Uprights: The Intentional Playbook for Success in Faith, Family, and Business](#)** by **Stu Crum (Author)**, **Douglas Glenn Clark (Author)** chronicles how a college football hero became a successful business leader — it was sports first, and then applying those lessons learned on the field to the world of business. Crum focuses on the intention from the beginning (as the title reflects): this is a book that makes goal-setting as simple as learning how to eliminate distractions and aim that kick. Sports-minded readers will enjoy the approach, with sections named “Game On,” “Game Changer,” and “Late Game Score,” along lots of stories and insights. The beauty in this book lies in the clarity of its approach: be accountable, stay positive, and go for it.
2. **[Playbook for Success: A Hall of Famer's Business Tactics for Teamwork and Leadership](#)** by **Nancy Lieberman** focuses on drawing from proven tactics to rise — and thrive — in the corporate world. Hall of Famer Lieberman is a trailblazer: she was a phenomenal basketball player who led her college team to national championships, rose to fame in the WBL and WNBA, and then coached in the NBA, only the second woman at the time to do so. Positioned for women entrepreneurs and leaders, this is nevertheless a book that offers plenty of wise words and practical strategies for all genders. (Magic Johnson wrote the foreword.) Lieberman profiles success stories from many fields and makes a strong

argument for a level of teamwork many women may not have experienced in the corporate ranks. But this isn't just a book for getting into the C-suite. It's also about winning at life.

3. **The Supply Chain Revolution: Unlocking the Sustainable Profit Chain** by **Art Koch** is a brilliant treatise from an expert on supply chain transformation that offers something extra: Koch is also a scuba diver who draws fascinating parallels between diving and managing the supply chain. In fact, it was while the author was underwater — in the still of the deep — that he did his best problem-solving. Tackling the supply chain challenges companies face today is a matter of getting the fundamentals right — same as in scuba — in order to be able to move forward safely. Koch shows how scuba practices parallel the best practices in supply chain management: bloated inventory is like being weighed down with too much gear; the need for allies and a buddy checklist is much the same as the buddy system in scuba, and so on. What makes this book so useful is that it's written by an authority who has the experience and confidence to make it entertaining — and he may even prompt readers to learn to scuba dive as well.
4. **Ping Pong Leadership: 18 Principles to Succeed at Any Table in Business, Sports, and Life** by **Justin Bookey** is another book packed with strategies that's framed in a fun sports context — in this case, ping pong. Bookey is an Emmy-nominated content creator and competitive table tennis player. He took a hard look at the training techniques that brought him the most success — and found that ping pong requires a level of responsiveness and tactical thinking that applies to leadership as well. Bookey also focuses on how organizations from small businesses to corporate giants can navigate change in this well-structured book, and includes plenty of helpful — and realistic — insights from leaders.
5. **Spotlight on Performance: Executive Inspiration, Volume II** by **Dr. Christian Marcolli** is a savvy guidebook to achieving peak performance for both athletes and executives. Marcolli is a top Swiss performance psychologist and leadership expert whose clients include professional athletes and business leaders. As a former pro soccer player, he has a clear understanding of the connection between competitive sports and executive performance. He combines vivid storytelling with workable, practical strategies, showing how even notable athletes like Roger Federer push themselves to keep growing and winning. One refreshing aspect to Marcolli's approach is his emphasis on balancing work and life, and finding ways to keep it light. As he notes, a sense of playfulness is just as important as a relentless focus on goals.
6. **The Real Madrid Way: How Values Created the Most Successful Sports Team on the Planet** by **Steven G. Mandis** tells the story of one of the greatest teams in soccer. Mandis taught at the Columbia Business School — and took it upon himself to look at the story of a remarkable comeback. Real Madrid was teetering on the financial brink in the 1990s — and went on to become the most successful sports clubs in history. The winning strategy didn't depend on data or numbers, but on community and people — it became a club for the community that made sure its actions tapped into the values of its fans. Along with fan

loyalty the club saw a huge leap in commercial success – which then made it possible to bring in the players that took it to the top. This also a great tale for business leaders that focuses on the value of culture and understanding your audience’s needs and wants, and a feel-good book filled with great lessons that apply to both sports and business.

What makes all of these books worth the read? They have different approaches and come from different perspectives, but all celebrate the glory of the win and how to achieve it in any arena. They’re full of ideas for inspiring employees to come together and perform at their best; tools for coaches to bring out excellence; tactics for recruiting talent and incorporating standouts into a team for the greatest good. They celebrate the passion to conquer a challenge and make a mark. And, they put some fun back into business strategies, reminding us to enjoy not just the victories, but the game itself.

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