

# PLAYING BY THE RULES

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*Lessons the business world can learn from Lance Armstrong*

*Extract from Bruce Piasecki (4 February 2013)*

Over the past few months, sports fans around the world have watched the downfall of the most celebrated cyclist of all time: Lance Armstrong. But what is of greatest interest is the lessons Armstrong's story offers the business world about the nature of **teams**.

The **team** is more powerful than the individual. People who would not normally be able to succeed alone can reap the benefits of success in the context of **teams**.

Yet many **teams** have a dark side. When these darker impulses are allowed to eclipse the joyful transcendence that **teamwork** can bring, great harm can result. Lance Armstrong is just one very dramatic and very visible example of what can go wrong with **teams**.

The U.S. Anti-Doping Agency report noted the evidence made clear that Armstrong had "ultimate control over his own personal drug use," and that "he also dictated its use over the doping culture for his team and the sport at large."

Compare these dynamics to those of other well-known sports' **teams**, and you'll see a marked contrast. The beauty of these **teams** is that their members work together in a way that allows everyone to learn together and work for the common good.

Similar dynamics play out on the "courts" of the business world every day. And when **teams** are well constructed with the right mix of talents and personalities companies achieve, grow and prosper. Yet when the "dark side" takes over, we see... Armstrongs.

So can the business world learn from the tragedy of Lance Armstrong? Here are some lessons business owners would do well to take note of:

**FIERCE INDIVIDUALISM HAS NO PLACE IN TEAMS.** When we pin all of our hopes on an individual, we are doomed to be disappointed.

**MVPS MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO DICTATE TO OR PRESSURE TEAMMATES.** The U.S. Anti-Doping Agency report made it clear that Armstrong was driving the doping culture of his team.

**WE MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO GIVE VICTORS THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT.** In all teams there is an inherent desire to protect our superstars and keep them winning.

**CEASELESS VICTORY IS A FANTASY.** Teams must keep a healthy sense of perspective. Lance Armstrong became a larger-than-life figure because he kept winning races. He was addicted to victory.

**GREAT TEAMS REVEL IN THE PLEASURE OF PERSISTENCE AND THE SHEER THRILL OF STRIVING.** Accepting the reality of our imperfection takes the pressure off.

**WHAT MAKES TEAMS SUCCESSFUL IS A SENSE OF COMMONALITY, SHARED VALUES, INTEGRITY AND A COMMITMENT TO ONE ANOTHER.** In becoming a member of a team, a transformation occurs where team members end their individual associations and create a team identity.

**THE RIGHT “CAPTAINS” CAN HELP US BUILD TEAMS STRONG ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND THE DARK SIDE.** Here, in the choosing and nurturing of captains, is where all of the lessons coalesce. It takes a certain type of leader to create not just a loose affiliation of fierce individualists but a true team.

Investing in teams and playing by the rules will bring the results and the profits you are looking for—and along the way you will empower your team to extend their wings.

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