

The Score Takes Care of Itself

- Bill Walsh

- Do all of the right things to precision and “the score will take care of itself.”
- Joe Montana on Walsh:
 1. His mind for technical football was extraordinary but beyond that was his ability to organize and manage his staff, players – to get the whole organization on exactly the same page. On that page he set the standard for how he wanted things done; simply – PERFECTION.
 2. He had in his mind an image of perfect football coupled with the knowledge of the details of *how* to accomplish it, which he was able to *teach*.
 3. His primary leadership asset: his ability to teach people how to think and play at a much higher level. *He taught us to hate mistakes.*
 4. He had us striving to be perfect in practice and in games. No mistakes i.e. fumbles, turnovers, mental errors.
 5. Without all of the screaming of most coaches, he was very focused & demanding.
 6. Being really good wasn’t good enough. He taught us to want to be perfect and instilled in the team a hunger for improvement, a drive to get better and better. We saw he own hunger for perfection, and it was contagious.
 7. Bill didn’t jump on you for a mistake; he came right in with correction. “Here’s what was wrong and this is how to do it right.” He taught the smallest details of perfecting performance.
 8. He was extremely demanding without a lot of noise. He was supportive. He was great at making people students.
 9. Everything he did was well thought out and ahead of the curve.
 10. Bill raised everybody’s standard, what we defined as acceptable. Perfection was his ultimate norm, and he got us thinking we could achieve it by teaching us what perfection is and how to achieve it.
- “I came to the 49’ers with a specific goal, to implement what I call the Standard of Performance. It was a way of doing things, a leadership philosophy that has as much to do with core values, principles, and ideals as with blocking, tackling, and passing; more to do with the mental than the physical.”

- Bill was a genius at making the complex comprehensible, and the comprehensible achievable.
- His ability to analyze an intractable problem and come up with a solution was stunning.
- His creative and commonsense brilliance as a problem solver was unsurpassed and a major component in his Standard of Performance.
- Bill absorbed good ideas from other coaches, learned from their bad ones, applied his own more advanced concepts, and then reveled in the process in teaching what he knew to his teams.
- One of the profound lessons I have learned is even when an organization is brimming with talent, victory is not always under your control. There is no guarantee, no ultimate formula for success. There is a however, a multitude of means to increase the probability of success; namely intelligently and relentlessly seeking solutions. When you do that, the score takes care of itself.
- Almost always, your road to victory goes through a place called failure.
- “The ability to help the people around me self-actualize their goals underlines the single aspect of my abilities and the label I value most – teacher.”
- Following the crushing loss to Miami, I was able to summon strength enough to pull my focus, my thinking, out of the past and move it on to our next big problem. It takes strength to shift your attention off the pain when you feel as though your soul has been stripped bare.
- Important to allow some “grieving time” but then recognize that the road to recovery and victory lies in having the strength to get up off the mat and start planning your next move. Failure is part of success, an integral part.
- The competitor who won’t go away, who won’t stay down, has one of the most formidable competitive advantages of all.
- **My Five Dos for Getting Back into the Game:**
 1. **Do expect defeat.** If you’re surprised when it happens, you’re dreaming; dreamers don’t last long.
 2. **Do force yourself to stop looking backward and dwelling on the “trainwreck.”** Its mental quicksand.
 3. **Do allow yourself appropriate recovery time.** A keyword is a little, don’t drag it out.
 4. **Do tell yourself, “I am going to stand and fight again,” with the knowledge that often when things are at their worst you’re closer than you can imagine to success.** Our Super Bowl victory arrived less than 16 months after our train wreck in Miami.
 5. **Do begin planning for your next serious encounter.** The smallest steps move you forward on the road to recovery. Focus on the fix.

- **My Five Don'ts**
 1. Don't ask, "Why me?"
 2. Don't expect sympathy.
 3. Don't bellyache.
 4. Don't keep accepting condolences.
 5. Don't blame others.
- I arrived in SF with an urgent timetable for installing an agenda of specific behavioral norms—actions and attitudes—that applied to every single person on our payroll.
- I would teach each person in the organization what to do and how to think; this created a new and productive self-image.
- While I prized preparation, planning, precision, and poise, I also knew that organizational ethics were crucial to ultimate ongoing success. It began with this fundamental leadership assertion: regardless of your specific job, it is vital to our team that you do that job at the highest possible level in all its various aspects, both mental and physical. I.E. Good talent with bad attitude equals bad talent.
- My mission statement was implanted in the minds of our people through teaching.
- You must know what needs to be done and possess the capabilities and convictions to get it done.
- A philosophy is the aggregate of your attitudes toward fundamental matters and is derived from a process of consciously thinking about critical issues and developing rational reasons for holding one particular belief over another.
- Your philosophy is the single most important navigational point on your leadership compass.
- **Bill's Standard of Performance**: Exhibit a ferocious and intelligently applied work ethic directed at continual improvement; demonstrate respect for each person in the organization and the work he or she does; be deeply committed to learning and teaching, which means increasing ones on expertise; be fair; demonstrate character; **honor the direct connection between details and improvement**; show self-control, especially under pressure; demonstrate and prize loyalty; use positive language and have a positive attitude; take pride in my effort as an entity separate from the result of that effort; be willing to go the extra distance for the organization; deal appropriately with victory and defeat; promote internal communication that is both open and substantive; seek poise in myself and those I lead; put the team's welfare and priorities ahead of my own; **maintain an ongoing level of concentration and focus that is abnormally high**; and make sacrifice and commitment the organization's trademark.
- Bill made many small requirements in his Standard of Performance that may seem trivial to many but *it all adds up and changes the environment*.

- Jerry Rice would stare in the mirror before games, making sure his uniform was perfect, every little detail. Not because he was vain or adoring but because he was looking at perfection; perfection was what was in his mind when he entered the arena.
- Our coaches created multiple drills for each individual skill each position needed to perform at the highest level, then practiced relentlessly until their execution at the highest level was automatic—routine perfection.
- The score wasn't the crushing issue that overrode everything else; the record didn't mean as much as the season progressed, because we were immersed in building the inventory of skills, both attitudinal and physical, that would lead to improved execution.
- I directed our focus less to the prize of victory than to the process of improving—obsessing about the quality of our execution and the content of our thinking; that is, our actions and our attitude.
- 4 characteristics I value most highly in hiring personnel: talent, character, functional intelligence, and an eagerness to adopt my way of doing things, my philosophy.
- I insisted that all employees not only raise their level of play but dramatically lift the level of their thinking.
- Each player had a connection to and was an extension of his teammates. Each of us has ownership in our organization.
- Victory is produced by and belongs to all. This is taught by the leader.
- Likewise, failure belongs to all.
- Leaders sometimes wonder why they fail to achieve success; never seem to reach their potential. It's often because they don't understand or can't instill the concept of what a team is all about at its best: connection and extension. The ultimate example is combat soldiers, "I can't let my buddies down." That's the ultimate connection and extension. This starts with the leader and leadership staff.
- Create a battlefield-like sense of camaraderie among the staff, an environment for people to find a way to bond together, to care about one another and the work they do, to feel the connection and extension so necessary for great results. Ultimately, it is the strongest bond of all; stronger than money.
- Winners act like winners before they are winners.
- People want to believe they're part of something special, an organization that is exceptional.
- I moved forward methodically with a deep belief that the many elements of my Standard of Performance would produce that kind of mindset, an organizational culture that would subsequently be the foundation for winning games.
- The culture precedes positive results. Champions have a winning standard of performance before they are winners.

- When starting to rebuild the 49'ers the performance results were not good measured from a won-loss record, but the organizational structure and environment were set in place to produce success.
- The exceptional assembly line comes first, before the quality car. My SoP was establishing a better and better “assembly line”. We were becoming a 1st class organization in all areas.
- Achieving success takes patience, time, and fortitude.
- If things are going well people will be elated and lose focus; if things are going poorly people are likely to be despondent and start looking for the exit. “Consistent effort is a consistent challenge.”
- I cut through that ebb and flow with my SoP. It was our point of reference, what we always returned to despite circumstances.
- The simplest correct execution of procedure represents the commitment of players and staff to the organization and the organization to them.
- **Establishing Your Standard of Performance:**
 1. **Start with a comprehensive recognition of, reverence for, and identification of the *specific actions and attitudes* relevant to your team’s performance and production.**
 2. **Be clarion clear in communicating your expectation of high effort and execution of your SoP.** Like water, many decent individuals will seek lower ground if left to their own inclinations.
 3. **Let all know that you expect them to possess the highest level of expertise in their area of responsibility.**
 4. **Beyond standards and methodology, teach your beliefs, values, and philosophy.** An organization is not an inanimate object. It is a living organism that you must nurture, guide, and strengthen.
 5. **Teach connection and extension.** A team filled with individuals who are “independent contractors” unattached to one another is a team with little interior cohesion and strength.
 6. **Make the expectations and metrics of competence that you demand in action and attitudes from the personnel the new reality of your organization.**
- I was a master at crunch time because I had put in years of smart hard work in mastering my craft and creating a comprehensive SoP for my organization.
- Some leaders drive their team past being able to perform with poise and presence and into a state of anxiety where they’re not thinking as clearly as they should. They pump them up so much for the “big game” that they can’t perform well.
- Bill was unbelievable how he could spot potential in a person and then develop it.

- (On creating his famed “West Coast Offense”) The naysayers were seeking victory, but only if it came the old-fashioned way. They were locked into the past and unwittingly locking themselves out of the future. Leaders do this to themselves & their organizations all of the time.
- **Lessons of the Bill Walsh Offense:**
 1. **Success doesn’t care which road you take to get to its doorstep.**
 2. **Be bold. Remove fear of the unknown from your mind.** Respect the past without clinging to it: “That’s the way we’ve always done it” is the mantra of a team setting itself up to lose to a team not doing it that way anymore.
 3. **Desperation should not drive innovation.** What assets do we have right now that we’re not taking advantage of? Make the most of what you’ve got.
 4. **Be obsessive in looking for the upside in the downside.** Instead of looking for reasons we couldn’t make it work, I sought solutions that would make it work.
- Welcome skeptics to your team. “If this does not work, what then?”
- Few things offer greater return on less investment than praise—offering credit to someone in your organization who has stepped up and done the job.
- Contingency planning is critical. You must continually be anticipating and preparing to deal with “foul weather.” This should include “fine weather” as well.
- Having a well thought out plan ready to go in advance of a change in the weather is the key to success.
- I kept asking and answering this question: “What do I do if...?”
- Most leaders take this no deeper than the 1st level of inquiry. You must envision the future deeply and in detail so that the unforeseeable becomes foreseeable.
- My preplanning was done in a clinical atmosphere. The more thorough, the more extensive, the more rehearsed, the better you perform under the pressure of any situation that calls for an immediate decision.
- A leader must see the forest and the trees.
- The final score of a football game is decided on average of 20% luck (injuries, bad calls, tricky bounce of the ball, etc.) I accepted the fact that I couldn’t control that 20%. The rest of it however, could be under my control with comprehensive planning and preparation.
- Regardless of the level of talent you have, you must maximize the 80%. I recognized that it is my job as a leader to get more out of my 80% than the opposing coach could get out of their 80%.
- **Controlling what you can control:**
 1. **Flying by the seat of your pants precedes crashing by the seat of your pants.**
 2. **Plan for foul or fair weather.** When you prepare for everything, you are ready for anything.

3. **Create a crisis-management team that is smart enough to anticipate and plan for crisis.** A wrong call made in a decisive manner is still the wrong call.
4. **All personal must recognize that your team is adaptive and dynamic in facing unstable “weather.”** It is a state of mind. Situations and circumstances change so quickly in football or business that no one can afford to get locked into one way of doing things.
5. **In the face of massive and often conflicting pressures, an organization must be resolute in its vision of the future and the contingent plans to get where it wants to go.**
6. **You bring on failure by reacting in an inappropriate manner to pressure or adversity.**