



# Coach your team to win



John Buchanan is the former coach of the Australian national cricket team and the Kolkata Knight Riders team in the Indian Premier League. Since his retirement from cricket John has turned his coaching and leadership skills to a business coaching career – Buchanan Success Coaching.

Better Business caught up with John Buchanan to ask how he draws on his knowledge and experience as coach of an elite level sport to help build and improve leadership skills in the business world.

Here is what John shared with us...

## The path to elite level coaching

John Buchanan never set out to be the coach of the Australian cricket team. He set out to be a player. At some point in his career, ambition and ability went in different directions.

In 1994 the opportunity arose to apply for the role of coach to the Queensland cricket team. “If you asked a leader what their coaching or leadership philosophy would be, most couldn’t say,” John said. That application became a watershed moment in John’s life. He knew he had to understand himself first before he could be clear on what he could bring to the coaching role.

It was necessary for John to draw on his experience as an administrator, teacher and parent (the hardest coaching job of all!) Initially he didn’t believe he really ‘had it’ but he came to realise he had actually been ‘coaching’ for some time. His approach was to build relationships with athletes and staff, look at all the systems and processes to keep what was working and change the procedures that weren’t.

After 5 successful years as coach of Queensland, the role of Head Coach to the Australian cricket team came up in October 1999. With only one year playing first class cricket John’s player credentials were low so he had to prove his coaching credentials instead. To the surprise of some he was appointed to the role of Head Coach. It was a position he held for almost 8 years before retiring from the role with a winning record of nearly 75%.

## The challenges as Australian coach

“Coaching is about relationships - some are simply more challenging than others,” John said. “It is critical to know your philosophy and value set and be the

same person day in and day out so your message is always the same.”

We asked John “How do you work with a team that undermines you?” John said “It is not a team that undermines you but there will always be those few that resist.” A top player can think “what can this bloke teach me?” Shane Warne was a great player whose voice naturally commanded authority within the Australian cricket team. Despite reported criticism of John, Shane quickly came to understand where John wanted to take the team. John makes it clear coaching is not a popularity contest - “when a new coach is introduced to a team you are employed as a ‘change agent’ - you haven’t been brought on board to keep doing the same. As a leader you have to know that and make the line clear by both your words AND actions.”

John says some people will be distant no matter what you do. There is always a cost/benefit analysis happening. A leader needs to look for ‘disciples’, ie people who are more in tune with you so the dissenters are managed by the majority or the rest of the group. But the team needs to know that those who ARE on board will be supported by the coach.

## Does this sound familiar to a working environment?

It’s easy to see how John has been able to successfully apply his coaching experience to leadership and management in the business world.

John shared his observations of where business owners can learn from the sporting world.

## Sport vs business

**Business owners are consumed by results** - many business owners develop a strategic plan over 3 to 5 years but are consumed by getting the results today. John understands that business needs results however he believes many owners spend too much time concerned with the bottom line and NOT enough time on how they got there. If business is going well then what is it they are doing well?

In John’s view people who control teams are often more worried about protecting their own job than the staff within their team. **To get results you need to have the right people.** To get the right people you need to:

- › **Attract**
- › **Empower**
- › **Retain**

An interesting aspect of John's approach is that he not only draws from his many successful experiences he also draws from some of his less successful campaigns. These provide additional insights to becoming a high performance business and team.

"Every business needs an environment that encourages people to have a go," John said. Even if the outcome is not exactly as planned the team can learn from the results. This can be possible with the right leadership.

### Is everyone coachable?

"Yes," said John "but whether they WANT to be is questionable." John uses the analogy of climbing Everest to describe the journey to a successful end goal. Having the vision however is not necessarily enough. You need the right people with the right skills to get there.

Many business people will be familiar with the term '**having the right people on the bus**'. If the combination of skills is not right to achieve the business goals then managers need to analyse the team and define the skills required to get there. They must ensure everyone in the team has those skills, or that all the necessary skills are contained within the team - but not necessarily by one person or in every person.

One particular advantage John identifies in a business environment is that the team is with their manager every day. By comparison an international cricket team will only come together leading up to and during a cricket series.

### Performance management

When it comes to job performance management John believes it is important for individuals to be their own best coach. In other words they will own their problems – total accountability and responsibility. Consequently, actions or behaviours can tell you when someone doesn't want to be part of the team. This is where the skill of leaders and managers come to the fore and rely on critical coaching components.

In sport, player performance is constantly measured. In business, performance management usually only happens every 6 to 12 months. This can lead to a disconnection between the manager and employee. Some form of measurement needs to be in place every day.

In John's opinion, the opportunity for better performance management is a **game changer for business**. Most business owners would question how they would find the time to do this but

John believes **if you invest in your people you get the return**. Investing in them to become leaders will lead to discretionary results. People will work smarter, harder, more creatively, with innovation and more likely remain loyal to the business, at least for longer. Without that investment it may be difficult to rely on or trust staff to deliver.

### Leadership qualities

One of the biggest drawbacks in business can be **how a leader leads**. Like John's own watershed moment, **taking the time to understand your own philosophy can help you attract people who can support the delivery of outcomes**.

Controlling managers have often learnt from previous managers and probably won't have a consistently peak performance business.

Getting individuals to be the best that they can be leads to a great team.

### Business people vs elite athletes

Business people are often self-driven and determined to be the best that they can be BUT they don't have a coach or choose not to invest in one.

Elite athletes would not excel to the top without a coach, however most business owners try to do the same without one.

A good coach works to ensure elite athletes are **their own best coach**. To do this they must:

- › prepare
- › understand the game plan
- › deliver on that plan

**A good business coach will do the same with the business owner.**

A sporting team is in competition on a weekend and has 4 to 5 days to prepare. **A business, on the other hand, is in competition EVERY DAY.**

Business owners are trying to be everything - leader and coach - so time

and resources are often a big challenge.

Business owners need to ask how THEY need to train and prepare to give themselves – and their team - the best chance to achieve their performance plans. This is where an in-house business coaching methodology can transform the results of a business.

We asked John "What are the benefits to a business owner of engaging a coach?" John advised that as a business you need to ask yourself "do we want to be high performance or NOT?"

High performing businesses:

- › dominate the marketplace for a long time, and
- › are market leaders, even during down times

As the 'leader' of a business you may have to do some soul searching to see if you and everyone within your business is committed to a high performance goal. Regardless, having a coach to help you and your team get there will no doubt bring you closer to your goal.

<http://buchanancoaching.com/>

John Buchanan is also on the Advisory Board of Victorian Leaders, a unique business development organisation focused on inspiring the next generation of leading companies.

The Advisory Board - consisting of leading Australian executive and non-executive directors - assists in developing the ongoing strategic direction of the Victorian Leaders network.

Victorian Leaders assists companies to achieve sustainable growth, manage succession planning and evaluate entry and exit strategies for their businesses. Using a combination of experience and its networks it operates a range of initiatives designed to benefit companies at different stages of growth via access to workshops, presentations, mentoring and one-to-one advice from executives within industry partner companies.

You can learn more about Victorian Leaders at [www.vicleaders.com.au](http://www.vicleaders.com.au)