

Required Reading for Growing Companies



caskey's corner

By Wayne Caskey
for Smart CEO

Curling Lessons

Staying on target in the dead of winter

Come with me for a winter sport adventure. We're going to the new National Capital Curling Center at the Gardens Ice House in Laurel for a curling match. You're going to stand next to me as I call the shots in this game, since I'm the skip tonight, and we'll see what leadership lessons we can learn.

We've put on our curling gear (special shoes for sliding and stability on the ice) and dressed warmly since it's 40 degrees out here on the ice. We're standing in the middle of a bull's-eye or "house," about 135 feet down the ice sheet from the other three members of the team. I'm holding a broom handle with a fabric "brush" head attached, which I use to indicate where stones are to be thrown and to sweep, if necessary.

First up to throw the 42-pound granite curling stone down the ice is our lead, Bob S. His usual job is to place his two stones just inside or outside the area where you and I are standing. Bob grips the stone, slides down the ice and releases the stone. His stone lacks the momentum to get

to the target area on its own, so I call "Sweep!" to the other two players on our team, who have been following the stone down the ice. They sweep vigorously with their brushes in front of the stone, smoothing the ice, reducing the friction, and lengthening the stone's total distance as it travels down the ice.

They oversweep a bit and I'm late in calling them up from sweeping, so the stone goes completely through the target area.

Curling Lesson 1:

When there is a screwup, it's often a joint responsibility.

It's easy to a) look for a scapegoat, or b) falsely assume all the responsibility oneself, with accompanying and disabling guilt and remorse. Reality is rarely that simple.

At the conclusion of the first inning or "end" of our game, we're losing 1-0. This is not a disaster, since there are seven ends to go in the game, and in this second end, we curl last rock, known as the "hammer," by virtue of losing the first end.

I call for my team to throw

widely separated stones in the house and then guard them with additional stones out in front of the house. My team members and I have curled together for years, they know my general strategy and are able to anticipate and execute my calls.

The benefits of our long association pay off, and we tie the score in the second end, 1-1.

Curling Lesson 2:

Shared vision and a seasoned management team enable "easy" successes.

It's now the fifth end. The score is tied, 2-2, so we've been trading points with our opponents. However, things are not going well in this end. Our opponents already have three stones in the house, and we're now looking at a potential disaster.

Our first three curlers have thrown their stones, and now it is my turn as skip to throw mine. My first stone comes to rest up against one of the opponent's stones in the house. Their stone is closer to the center than mine, however, and counts. My second stone is wide of the mark, but we

limit the opponents to a score of one stone.

Curling Lesson 3:

When you see disaster about to occur, take the conservative action most likely to limit damage, not the heroic action which may sacrifice all.

It's now the beginning of the seventh end, and we're behind, 4-2. We have two well-guarded stones in the house, and our vice-skip, Barry, has just put another guard in front. I yell down the ice "Great job, Barry!" Our other team members praise the shot, and Barry smiles.

Despite this great positioning, the opposing skip makes an even greater shot on his last stone, and we add only one point to our score.

Curling Lesson 4:

Acknowledge great performance well before the final result is in.

Curling Lesson 5:

Never underestimate your competition.

It's now the final end, and not

only are we behind, 4-3, but our opponents, who have been curling well, have the last stone in this end. It's not looking good for us.

They put their first two stones in the house, but they are lined up pretty well on each other, so I call for our second, Bob P, to take out both stones. Bob delivers and we have a clean house for our last four rocks.

The opponent's vice-skip misses Barry's first stone, which has landed in the house, and Barry is able to guard it with his second stone. Barry now goes to the house to make the call for my last two stones. He makes a call I don't understand, so I go down the ice to talk to him. He explains what he has in mind---setting up another target to draw our oppo-

nent's last two stones, and I return to throw my stones. I let my first stone go and it doesn't have enough weight. Fortunately, the two Bobs are on it immediately, sweeping for all they're worth, and they are able to sweep it all the way to the place Barry wanted it.

Curling Lesson 6:

Checking and rechecking to make sure that signals are understood is important.

Curling Lesson 7:

When you as the skip mess up, it's great to have a team that covers for you and makes you look good.

Now it's down to the last two shots of the game. We're laying two, which will give us enough for

the win. My last shot lands about three inches from where Barry called for it to be, and doesn't provide the complete protection for our stones we wanted. The opposing skip can knock out one or both of our stones with his last stone resulting in a tie, or a loss for us. He misses his takeout shot, and we win, 5-4.

Curling Lesson 8:

If you can't be good, be lucky.

In the locker room the Bobs, Barry and I take time to debrief our performance in the game. Each of us learns something valuable from the feedback.

Curling Lesson 9:

Regular evaluation of team performance can be as valuable as

strategic or operational planning.

Afterwards, we're sitting with our opponents in the "warm room" adjoining the curling ice, having a beer. We talk about the game, and about various matters, topical and personal. On our way out, the opponent's skip asks me to curl with his team in an upcoming curling tournament. I accept.

Curling Lesson 10:

Today's competitors may be tomorrow's allies.

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