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THE SYSTEMS COACH: Bill Belichick

By John Baldoni

One of the most heralded coaches in American professional sports today is a man who does not shout, scream, or intimidate his players. His coaching style is more in keeping with middle managers than celebrity executives. In college he studied economics; he uses logic and reason, backed by a system of his own creation, to fashion a winning football program. He is Bill Belichick of the New England Patriots, head coach, personnel director, and chief operating officer.



A graduate of Wesleyan College, Belichick is a cerebral coach. In contrast to Vince Lombardi or Bill Parcells, two successful coaches whose powerful personalities brought discipline to their teams, Belichick is low-key. He has won players to his way not by shouting but rather through thorough preparation, clear communication, and recognition of team effort. Here are five distinctive features of his coaching style that have implications for

managing and leading any high performance team:

Develop a system. Belichick ruthlessly exploits his opponents' weaknesses and methodically places the right players in the right positions. He makes the most of the talent he has at the moment by dissecting opposition weaknesses and teaching his players how to capitalize on them.

Teach and adjust the system. Belichick devotes hours to learning what aspects of his system worked in past games and what did not. He then conveys his insights to the team, emphasizing the competitive threats and the team's strengths against them, and adjusting the system to fit the reality.

Instill discipline. Belichick traded Lawyer Milloy, a defensive back, to the Buffalo Bills in 2003. Although Milloy had been a key ingredient in New England's defense, his demands for more money were disrupting team cohesion, and despite an outcry from media and fans, Belichick removed the player from his team.

Recruit the best within the budget. The mission statement of the New England Patriots states, "We are building a big, strong, fast, smart, tough and disciplined football team that consistently competes for championships." Belichick's looks for the best talent – within his budget. "What I respect about Bill," says owner Robert Kraft, "is we have a system in place, and it's not dependent upon what the marketplace has to offer."

Support the team. Belichick was fired from his first head coaching job at Cleveland after several losing seasons. He took the blame upon himself and offered only public praise for his players.

Note: John Baldoni is a leadership communications consultant, speaker, and author; his newest book is *Great Motivation Secrets of Great Leaders* to be published in January; and he can be reached at john@johnbaldoni.com. Quotes and football facts are drawn from Judy Battista "Patriots Adhere to Bottom Line to Stay on Top," *New York Times*, August 8, 2004.