

A GUIDE TO SPORTS TALK IN THE U.S. WORKPLACE

TALKING A GOOD GAME

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AND
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A Guide to Sports Talk in the U.S. Workplace

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Talking A Good Game, LLC.

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"Each year, we work with thousands of up-and-coming leaders from all around the world, and we learn a great deal about their challenges and struggles as they climb the ladder. Among the biggest challenges is the need to cultivate a strong network of allies and partners. Many leaders find this difficult, particularly when the organization's culture is polarized in some way. Polarizations exist by culture, gender, race, functional or technical background, and a host of other factors. What's clear is that being able to forge strong and authentic personal relationships that transcend these boundaries is essential to success. This is particularly true at more senior levels of leadership where there are fewer leaders, stronger personalities, complex politics, and greater pressure to perform. I think (talking sports) is critical for many, if not all leaders who aspire to greater levels of responsibility, and greater impact in their organizations."

Matt Paese, Ph.D., Vice President, Executive Solutions at DDI, responsible for the research, development, and implementation of DDI's succession management, executive coaching, and executive assessment methodologies.

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CHAPTER 1

GET IN THE GAME: WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

*“Golf is the new Green Card...
It’s your card to get into the C-level Suite.”*

—Cileia Miranda-Yuen, former marketing executive at Nestle

This chapter illustrates the impact of sports on everyday life and the valuable role that sports talk plays in the workplace.

If you work and live in the United States, or simply work with Americans, chances are that at least once a day some aspect of spectator sports invades your life. Do you see a billboard or two promoting your adopted town’s American football, baseball, basketball or hockey team on your commute to or from work? Perhaps a colleague or client referenced a game

during a conference call? Or, maybe it was a variety of sporting events and sports news on multiple TV screens at the restaurant you visited for lunch.



DID YOU KNOW?

According to Nielson Media Research, 225 million Americans watched NFL games in 2008. That's nearly 100 million more than the record number of Americans who voted in the 2008 Presidential election (131.2 million)!

The point is that sports is all pervasive in American culture. The very fact that sports has its own daily section in every major newspaper along with countless radio, network and cable TV programming, Websites, Twitter and blogs tells us something about its significance in American society. Accordingly, generally 30-40% of the entire U.S. population watches the Super Bowl each year. Now you might be thinking, 'that means that about 2/3 of the population isn't watching!' However, it just so happens that the population that IS watching is probably closest to the population you work and socialize with: According to Nielsen Research, 54% of Super Bowl viewers are male, and ratings for the Super Bowl viewership improve in older demographics.

For non-Americans, an easy comparison is The World Cup. This event attracts an extraordinary viewership that impacts the working world, according to a 2006 research report commissioned by the global recruiting firm, Hudson, and conducted by The Social Issues Research Centre (SIRC),

titled *The Impact of Sport on the UK Workplace*. "Seventy percent of men and 62% of women residents in England said that it will have an impact on their working lives—by boosting morale if the team does well, creating a team spirit and providing an environment for social inclusion. Other major events, such as Wimbledon, the Ashes, (for you Americans, that is one of the most celebrated Cricket rivalries, played between England and Australia), and the Rugby World Cup, have and will continue to act as catalysts for communication and bonding."

The report also confirmed what we have surmised throughout our careers, that "...talking sport' is a way of breaking down barriers. It can make or break a sale or the relationship between a manager and his/her team. In fact, sport enhances creativity and promotes sharing of ideas."

If we were so inclined, we would share the many theories and supporting research trying to explain America's love affair with sports. But we're not. That is because, from our standpoint, it doesn't matter WHY sports play such an important role in American culture, and in cultures around the world. It is simply enough to note that they do. In fact, it is likely that your home country has a rich fabric of sports history, which is an important part of its national psyche, and is critical in the business world.

If you're reading this book, chances also are that either you're new to—or you simply don't follow—American sports. If you call another country home, it could be that you enjoy your own country's sports, and you think you would enjoy