

VINCE LOMBARDI - THE SPEECH: LEADERSHIP

Version of The Speech, last delivered in Dayton, Ohio, on June 22, 1970. A week later, Vince Lombardi entered a hospital in Washington, D.C., for treatment of excruciating stomach pains. He died three months later. Retrieved from the Internet from Book: *Lombardi: What It Takes To Be #1* by his son Vince Lombardi, Jr, McGraw Hill 2001.



A year ago, in making a talk to a similar group in a similar situation, I had a difficult time in arriving at a method of approach: how to reach this intelligent audience?

Then, finally, I arrived at the only subject through which I could conceivably contribute anything—my own experience of trampling grapes in my local vineyard—namely, football.

I have been in football all my life, and I do not know whether I am particularly qualified to do much else except coach football. I can only say it is a great game, a game of great lessons, a game that has become a symbol of this country's best attributes—namely, courage, stamina, and coordinated efficiency.

It is a Spartan game, and requires Spartan-like qualities in order to play it. By that, of course, I don't mean the Spartan tradition of leaving the weak to die. I mean, instead, the qualities of sacrifice, self-denial, dedication, and fearlessness.

Football is a violent game. To play it any other way but violently would be imbecilic. But because of its violent nature, it demands a personal discipline seldom found in modern life.

Football is more than the National Football League alone. Football is Red Grange, Jim Thorpe, and the many hundreds of other stars who have made this the great game that it is. Football is all of the thousands of high school and college boys who play it and the many millions more who watch it, either in person or on television.

Regardless of what level it is played upon—high school, college, or the professional level—it has become a game that not only exemplifies this country's finest attributes, but more than that, it has the means and the power to provide mental and physical relaxation to the millions who watch it from the sidelines.

I need no other authority than the great General MacArthur to prove my point, and I quote him:

Competitive sports keeps alive in all of us a spirit of vitality and enterprise. It teaches the strong to know when they are weak, and the brave to face themselves when they are afraid. It teaches us to be proud and unbending in defeat, yet humble and gentle in victory. It teaches us to master ourselves before we attempt to master others. It teaches us to learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep. It gives a predominance of courage over timidity.

I sometimes wonder whether those of us who love football fully appreciate its great lessons. For example: that it is a game played by more than a million Americans and yet, a game uninhibited by racial or social barriers.

It is a game that requires, in early season, exhaustive hard work to the point of drudgery. A game of team action, wherein the individual's reward is that total satisfaction that is returned

by being part of the successful whole. A game that gives you 100-percent fun when you win and exacts 100-percent resolution when you lose.

A game like war and also a game most like life—for it teaches that work, sacrifice, perseverance, competitive drive, selflessness, and respect for authority are the price one pays to achieve worthwhile goals.

And it has larger implications. Today, all of us are engaged in a struggle more fiercely contested and far more important to our future. It is the struggle for the hearts, the minds, and the souls of men. In this struggle, there are no spectators, only players. It is a struggle that will test our courage, our strength, and our stamina. Only if we are physically, mentally, and spiritually fit will we win.

We live in an age fit for heroes. No time has ever offered such perils or such prizes. Man can provide a full life for humanity—or he can destroy himself with the problems he has created. The test of this century will be whether man confuses the growth of wealth and power with the growth of spirit and character. If he does, he will be like some infant playing with matches who destroys the very house he would have inherited.

You are the leaders of this country. I believe it is the obligation of our leaders to see that we are awakened to this need. Unless we can do something to get everyone in America moving in this direction, we may not be able to keep America strong.

Calisthenics, exercise, and muscle toning are not the complete answer. There is also a need to develop a strong spirit of competitive interest throughout the nation. In other words, a strong body is only one-half of the answer. We fail in our obligation if we do not also preserve the American zeal to be first and the will to win.

American freedom—and I mean freedom, not license—could be lost and possibly succumb to the consequence of aggressive secularism and communism, unless the values underlying that freedom are thoroughly understood and embraced by our leaders.

For decades, we as individuals have struggled to liberate ourselves from ancient tradition, congealed creeds, and despotic states. In this struggle, freedom was necessarily idealized against order, the new against the old, and genius against discipline. Everything was done to strengthen the right of the individual and weaken the authority of the state and church. Maybe the battle was too completely won.

Maybe we have too much freedom. Maybe we have so long ridiculed authority in the family, discipline in education, decency in conduct, and law in the state that our freedom has brought us close to chaos.

Maybe our leaders no longer understand the relationship between themselves and the people—that is, that the people want to be independent and dependent, all at the same time. They want to assert themselves and yet at the same time be told what to do.

Management *is* leadership. When management fails, it reflects a lack of leadership. All of you possess leadership ability. But leadership rests not only on outstanding ability. It also rests on commitment, loyalty, and pride. It rests on followers who are ready to accept guidance. Leadership is the ability to direct people and—more important—to have those people accept that direction.

The educated man is the natural leader. He may not get all of his education in college; in fact, his inspiration may come from anyplace. If he studies the past, his country, his people, his ancestry, and the lessons of history, he is educated.

I think you will agree that what is needed in the world today is not just engineers and scientists. What is needed, too, is people who will keep their heads in an emergency, no matter what the field. Leaders, in other words, who can meet intricate problems with wisdom and with courage.

Leadership is not just one quality, but rather a blend of many qualities. And while no one individual possesses all of the talents that are needed for leadership, each man can develop a combination that can make him a leader. Contrary to the opinion of many, leaders are not born; they are made. And they are made by hard effort, which is the price we must all pay for success.

We are not born equal. Rather, we are born unequal. The talented are no more responsible for their talent than the underprivileged are for their position. The measure of each is what he does.

Our society, at the present time, seems to have sympathy only for the misfit, the ne'er-do-well, the maladjusted, the criminal, the loser. It is time to stand up for the doer, the achiever, the one who sets out to do something and does it. The one who recognizes the problems and opportunities at hand, and deals with them, and is successful, and is not worrying about the failings of others. The one who is constantly looking for more to do. The one who carries the work of the world on his shoulders. The leader. We will never create a good society, much less a great one, until individual excellence is respected and encouraged.

To be a leader, you must be honest with yourself. You must know that as a leader, you are "like everyone else"—only more so. You must identify yourself with the group and back them up, even at the risk of displeasing your superiors. You must believe that the group wants, above all else, the leader's approval. Once this feeling prevails, productivity, discipline, and morale will all be high. In return, you must demand from the group cooperation to promote the goals of the corporation.

As a leader, you must believe in teamwork through participation. As a result, your contacts with the group must be close and informal. You must be sensitive to the emotional needs and expectations of others. In return, the group's attitude toward the leader should be one of confidence infused with affection.

And yet, the leader must always walk the tightrope between the consent he must win and the control he must exert. Despite the need for teamwork and participation, the leader can never close the gap between himself and the group. If he does, he is no longer what he has to be. The leader is a lonely person. He must maintain a certain distance between himself and the members of the group.

A leader does not exist in the abstract, but rather in terms of what he does in a specific situation. A leader is judged in terms of what others do to obtain the results that he is placed there to get.

You, as a leader, must possess the quality of mental toughness. This is a difficult quality to explain, but in my opinion, this is the most important element in the character of the leader.

Mental toughness is many things. It is humility. It is simplicity. The leader always remembers that simplicity is the sign of true greatness and meekness, the sign of true strength. Mental toughness is Spartanism, with all its qualities of self-denial, sacrifice, dedication, fearlessness, and love.

Yes, love. “Love” is not necessarily “liking.” You do not need to like someone in order to love them. Love is loyalty. Love is teamwork. Love is respect for the dignity of an individual. Love is charity. The love I speak of is not detraction. A man who belittles another—who is not loyal, who speaks ill of another—is not a leader and does not belong in the top echelons of management.

I’m not advocating that love is the answer to everything. I am not advocating a love that forces everyone to love everybody else. I am not saying that we must love the white man because he is white, or the black man because he is black, or the poor man because he is poor, or the enemy because he is the enemy, or the perverse because he is perverse. Rather, I am advocating a love for the human being—any human being, who just happens to be white, black, poor or rich, enemy or friend.

Heart power is the strength of your company, of your organization, of America. Hate power is the weakness of the world.

Mental toughness is also the perfectly disciplined will. The strength of your group is in your will—in the will of the leader. The difference between a successful man and others is not in the lack of strength, nor in the lack of knowledge, but rather, in the lack of will. The real difference between men is in energy. It is in the strong will, the settled purpose, the invincible determination.

But remember that the will is the character in action. If we would create something, we must be something. This is character. Character is higher than intellect. Character is the direct result of mental attitude. A man cannot dream himself into character; he must hammer and forge one for himself. He cannot copy someone else’s qualities; he must develop his own character qualities to fit his own personality.

We should remember, too, that there is only one kind of discipline, and that is the perfect discipline. As a leader, you must enforce and maintain that discipline; otherwise, you will fail at your job.

Leadership lies in sacrifice, self-denial, love, fearlessness, and humility.

And this is the distinction between great and little men.

