



By Richard D. Czerniawski

## WHAT IT TAKES TO BECOME A PERENNIAL WINNER

It's in the record books. The Kansas City Chiefs are the LIV Super Bowl champions. They defeated the San Francisco Forty-Niners 31 - 20 in their inimitable come-from-behind way. KC scored 21-points in the final quarter to overcome a 10-point deficit.

Kansas City, which had gone 50-years since their last Super Bowl win (IV), erupted in celebration. The festivities were compared to Mardi Gras in New Orleans, with people partying in the streets into the wee hours of the morning. A parade was planned for Wednesday, 5 February, and the public schools were closed so families could participate in the celebration of the Chiefs' stunning victory.

Pundits are opining that this could lead to a dynasty as this team is young—its star quarterback and Super Bowl MVP (Most Valuable Player), Patrick Mahomes, is 24-years old and only in his second year in the league. Importantly, the coaches, players, and staff are eager to prove they can repeat—the test of true championship teams.

Swimming around in my head is the question, "what does it take to repeat a championship—to be a perennial winner?" I'm less interested in exploring this issue for football, or any sport for that matter. My interest is learning what contributes to becoming a perennial winner in any endeavor. It is not a far-fetched comparison between winning in sports and business. After all, we use the label "franchise" for sports teams, brands, and businesses. While the activities are different, the principles, practices, and processes are likely to be universal.

The first thing that comes to my mind is the barriers to winning. "What might thwart 'repeating?'" Hubris is a culprit. It's when you believe your team—regardless of whether they play on the field or in the market—have all the answers and competitors are inferior. Another is the self-satisfaction that results from stretching to reach a significant goal. It is often followed by a letdown when the euphoria begins to fade. Both contribute to inertia—reducing the hunger for winning and undermining a team's work ethic. Meanwhile, the winning team becomes everyone's target, and competitors redouble their efforts to dethrone and humble the champion. They even go so far to become fast followers to neutralize any advantages the championship team may have enjoyed.

So then, what does it take to repeat? One is to realize that if you don't improve, you will not be able to continue winning. You must work to improve because other teams and brands have their sights on beating and dethroning you. There's a story about an Olympic Sculler who wins the gold medal

in record time. Having practiced seven days a week for several hours per day over years, the sculler declares to his coach that he is going to take several months' vacation and tour the world. His coach, astonished by his athlete's declaration, asks the sculler if he plans to win then next Olympics. "Of course," replies the sculler. "I will defend my position as the 'number 1' sculler in the world." The coach cautions that if the sculler doesn't immediately begin practicing following this Olympics, his winning time will not even qualify him for the next. Champions know and heed this lesson. They also know they must improve performance. They employ practices such as kaizen to build on strengths and overcome vulnerabilities.

Leading with innovation is another key to becoming a perennial winner. Playing the same game in a market that is evolving will catch your team short. On the other hand, winners must innovate, so they are neither predictable nor allow competitors to close the performance gap or, worse yet, leapfrog their team, brand. Innovating includes identifying where the market is going and running before competitors to be the first to make it happen.

Winning is a team sport. It takes strong leadership and the intelligent collaboration of all members of the team. Each player needs to subjugate his ego and work toward common goals. This includes personal development, learning from experiences, and adapting appropriately. It demands courage to confront poor attitudes and performance. Winning demands accountability. It also takes sound coaching to transport the team to a place it could not get on its own.

Repeat winning necessitates continued investment. It's not about investing indiscriminately but focussing support on those things, strategies, and activities that have proven effective. We invest in those people, elements, and ideas that will have a significant impact on achieving and exceeding common goals, whether that is another Super Bowl championship, growing a brand's leadership position in the marketplace, or achieving growth objectives.

Becoming a perennial winner requires that we, and the teams we play for, avoid complacency, and pursue excellence. This pursuit of excellence includes employing practices such as kaizen, innovating, capitalizing on the collective wisdom of the team, providing strong leadership, accepting accountability, and investing in the right things—among others. Now it's time to put in the work to make it happen!

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