5 Partnership Lessons From Bill Belichick and Tom Brady

Neither would be wearing so many Super Bowl rings without the other.

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Bill Belichick and Tom Brady of the New England Patriots are the most successful, iconic coach-quarterback duo in the history of the NFL. I'm a football fan, and anyone who follows the NFL even on a casual basis is likely familiar with the steady praise — or, for non-Patriots fans, hopefully at least grudging admiration — for Brady and Belichick and the debate about how much credit each of them deserves for their team's phenomenal run of success.

Too many sports commentators try to turn this debate into a seriously scientific point of contention, attempting to divvy out the credit between coach and QB in terms of percentages. One person says it's 80 percent Brady, and the person sitting in the next seat says it's 80 percent Belichick. My opinion is that there would be no Super Bowls without the complex interplay of both of them.

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As I think back on my past experiences as an entrepreneur and working with small businesses and business partnerships over the years, there are several key lessons about leadership, management and life success that we can learn from the partnership of Brady and Belichick. Here's a few tips on how

to build a Brady-Belichick-style partnership at your business.

1. Complement each other’s skills.

Belichick is widely respected as the brightest football mind of his generation. He’s obsessive about football, he’s disciplined, and he’s always trying to out-think the other coach with his game plans and his personnel strategies. Brady is known for his obsessive preparation and his single-minded competitive focus on offense, but he’s also been more of the “face” of the organization. Belichick is notoriously tight-lipped with the media, so Brady has become more of the charismatic public-facing spokesperson for the team. They complement each other and manage different facets of what needs to happen for the team to succeed.

In the same way, you need to have a partner with very different skill sets and interests from your own. That’s the best way to cover your weaknesses and maximize your strengths. Too often, people try to form business partnerships or work with a company cofounder where both partners are highly technical or good at the numbers side of the business, but they have a blind spot for customer relationship development. Or maybe you have a business partnership where you’re both really creative, but your business lacks discipline. This presents a problem. Pay attention to the skill sets and interest areas of your prospective partners or your executive team. If one person is great with people, the other should be great at product development. Your business needs a good balance between the skills and passions of the founders and partners if it’s going to thrive for the long run.

2. Trust each other.

Belichick has on numerous occasions managed the game clock in a way to get the ball back for one last possession at the end of the game, to give Brady that final drive, feeling like if

anyone can deliver, it’s Brady. He’s also known for repeatedly being tough and unsentimental when making personnel moves, even if the team has to part ways with popular players – but he’s always kept Brady on the team and prioritized Brady, even as Brady has passed age 40. The two of them have a strong sense of trust and teamwork.

In the same way, any business partnership needs to be built on trust. It’s almost like a marriage, in terms of the level of closeness. You’re going to be working with this person every day and taking a financial risk together. You need to make sure that your business partners are honest, transparent, upfront and authentic with you. You’re building something great together, so you need to make sure you’re on the same page.

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3. Mutual respect, no need to be friends.

You sometimes will hear about friction between the two, but Brady always refers to Belichick as “Coach.” NFL team locker rooms are often hotbeds of drama and backstabbing, with lots of clashes of big egos and juicy gossip getting leaked to the media. The Patriots, with few exceptions, have run a tight ship, and that strong level of trust between Brady and Belichick is likely responsible.

Business partners don’t always have to be best friends, In fact, sometimes the stresses of building a business can strain a friendship. But no matter what happens, you always need to respect each other’s abilities and believe in each other’s good faith.

4. You need to be aligned with each other.

Too many people learn this the hard way, but it's true. All business partners need to be fairly aligned. For example, if one partner gets 80 percent of the revenue for closing a deal, the other partner might not feel as enthusiastic to put in the extra effort next time. When partners start feeling disrespected or underpaid, they will start to look for the exits — often threatening the viability of the entire business.

5. Share duties; share the workload.

Belichick and Brady are known to be the most dedicated to their respective jobs. They're the first ones in the film room or weight room in the morning and the last ones to leave the team facility at night. Make sure your business partner is carrying the same share of the workload. Some startups and small businesses are in an untenable situation where the company is the full-time job for one partner, while the other partner is still working at a day job and not able or willing to put in the full amount of effort on the new business. This often leads to resentment from the full-timer, and exhaustion from the part-timer — and it's bad for the business. A true partnership is just that: working side by side.

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Whether or not you're a Patriots fan or even a football fan, it's remarkable to see the run of success that this coach and quarterback partnership has created over their nine Super Bowls together. Most entrepreneurs are not competing in such a high-profile field or against such cutthroat competition as an

NFL team, but the leadership and management lessons are often the same. Build trust and respect with your partners. Complement each other’s skills. Look for ways to keep fostering better teamwork and staying in alignment with compensation and credit for the success. Over time, you too can develop a business that is built for sustainable success.

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