

I Own a Professional Rugby Team – Here Are the 5 Biggest Lessons It's Taught Me About Business Leadership

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When I signed on as a founding owner of the Houston SaberCats, people asked me the same question over and over: *"Why rugby?"*

To be fair, it wasn't the obvious move. I'd already built a successful career in commodities trading and entrepreneurship. Rugby wasn't a mainstream sport in the U.S., and it was clear we'd be climbing uphill in search for new market, new fans and new infrastructure. But that's exactly what drew me to it.

Entrepreneurs know that if you only play safe games, you'll never learn anything new. Rugby, in all its rawness, became a mirror for my business endeavors: tough, unpredictable and full of lessons that reshaped how I lead. Here are the five biggest ones.

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1. Play through the hit

I'll never forget standing on the sideline of our first SaberCats match, watching one of our players get leveled by a brutal tackle. Most people would've stayed down. He didn't. He fought for every inch, rolled and kept driving the ball forward. The crowd erupted.

That image stuck with me. In rugby, getting hit is part of the game, and when you get hit, you don't stop – you adapt mid-impact. In business, the “hit” looks like a failed deal, a regulatory curveball or a market downturn. I've had plenty of those. What separates winning leaders from the rest isn't avoiding the hit; it's what they do after. Push forward. Stay on your feet. Make the play anyway.

2. Trust the pack

Early on, I thought entrepreneurship was about individual brilliance, where the best idea, the hardest worker and the guy willing to put in more hours than anyone else wins. Rugby shattered that illusion.

A scrum is pure trust. Eight players lock in, shoulder to shoulder, with one mission: Move forward. If even one man falters, the whole formation collapses. It's messy, it's physical, and it's all-or-nothing.

That's exactly what business teams should look like. At GETCHOICE!, I've learned that success isn't about me making every call. It is about surrounding myself with the right people, trusting them to do their jobs and creating a culture where loyalty and accountability are non-negotiable. No pack, no progress.

3. Adapt on the fly

Rugby is chaos. There are no endless timeouts to plan your next move. Plays evolve in seconds, and players must read the field, adjust and execute in real time.

I've had moments in business where a deal collapsed overnight or new regulations flipped our strategy upside down. The instinct is to freeze, but rugby trained me to do the opposite: Call an audible, pivot, and move. You may not always

have perfect data, but you always have instinct and courage. And sometimes, that's all you need to keep momentum alive.

4. Respect the grind

Here's what most people don't realize about rugby: These athletes play with no pads, no helmets and no glamour. It's 80 minutes of collisions, sweat and bruises. And yet they do it because they love the grind.

That mentality is the same in entrepreneurship. When people see an acquisition announcement or a headline about success, they don't see the years of grueling work behind it. The 4 a.m. flights. The contracts that fell apart. The stress of payroll weeks. Rugby reminded me that toughness isn't a one-time choice but rather it's a way of life. You have to *enjoy* the grind, because that's what forges winners.

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5. Leave it all on the field

Rugby has this tradition I fell in love with: After the final whistle, rivals share beers. Think about that – you spend 80 minutes hitting each other with everything you've got, and then you sit down together with mutual respect.

I've carried that same mindset into business. Compete fiercely, play full out, but respect your rivals. Shake hands. Learn from them. Because the legacy you leave isn't about a single game or deal – it's about how you show up, how you compete and the way people remember you when the whistle blows.

Rugby is the ultimate underdog game: tough, unpolished, but rich with lessons about teamwork, grit and respect. It changed how I lead, how I compete, and how I build companies.

And here's the truth: Business, like rugby, isn't for the faint of heart. You will get hit. You will get tested. But if you trust your pack, adapt when the field shifts and respect the grind, you'll not just play the game, you'll own it.

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