



**DO WHAT YOU  
SAY YOU'LL DO**

And other tools to LEAD courageously

## ***Interview with Brian Cook***

***Brian Cook is a 5 time AFL Premiership CEO, who talks about leadership in high performance organisations. A lifetime spent in this high-pressure industry has resulted in so many interesting experiences and shaped some interesting life opinions!***

**Does your leadership style and approach change depending on the specific situation? Or are you fundamentally the same person, applying the same skill set to a different situation?**

I think as a leader there are some non negotiables , eg the core values, however the style can change depending on the situation. This is particularly the case when dealing with indirect reports ie people you do not know well. As a CEO for me these people are middle managers or task force members that you communicate with. There is some good recent research indicating that inability to lead indirect reports is one of the major reasons for career derailment.

A rule that I try to follow in leading and giving feedback to people is: “Right place, right time, right way”

**Given the role of coaches within the football / sporting community, how widely embraced is coaching as a discipline within the admin/management side of the clubs you have worked in (i.e. -not the players but those that support them – is coaching considered important for those support people?)**

Really good question.

Coaches are generally highly organized, ultra accountable, collaborative, teachers of skill and strategy. They are culture developers, delegators, technicians and brand managers. In our appointment of Chris Scott to our senior coaching role we had various weightings for this role as follows:

Leadership and Cultural Development 25%  
 Management 17%  
 Personal qualities 20%  
 Technical skills 13%  
 Communication skills 10%  
 Coaching history 10%  
 Commercial Skills 5%

If your question is, “does community recognize this type of skill and leadership make up” or a senior coach the answer is probably a “no” albeit it’s getting better. However internally to the Club and our Industry generally it is widely acknowledged that the role is diverse and difficult.



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**How important do you think mentors are in building the leaders of the future? Have you personally found mentors to be of significant value in your career?**

Mentoring can be marvelous and it can also be unimpressive. It is so important to find, even if you need to remunerate, a mentor or mentors. I love the Bill George template of having:

- One person you can share everything with, be completely open with, eg spouse, significant other, best friend. For me it's one of my best friends;
- Mentor(s) who can guide and counsel you and keep you from going off track. I have a paid mentor who was recommended to me by a business associate 10 years ago;
- A support group of your peers. I have 4 or 5 really close friends I have had for 30 years and we do lunch every 6 months to get feedback on how they see how I am going. They are brutally honest!

**What is the one message that you would leave emerging leaders with – what one thing can they do which will make a difference to the way that they lead?**

Do what you say you will do!



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### *Interview with Brian Cook and Allan Bennetto*

**Your time at both West Coast and Geelong Football Clubs has seen you turn financial basket cases into league powerhouses. Most businesses at some point also find themselves in troubled waters or in need of a strategic pivot to be successful. What were some of the key initiatives you undertook to firstly uncover the key problems and secondly set the course for success? What advice do you have for businesses and entrepreneurs who find themselves in a similar situation?**

Try to find out the exact position and why the organization is in that position

- Look at your bank balance and ask why ,why and why, peel off the layers until you get to the real issues;
- View all contracts of employees, contractors, suppliers;
- Evaluate the culture. What are the behaviors rewarded and what type of employees are being promoted?
- Find out if there is a business plan or simply a budget. If there is a business plan is it owned? If there is only a budget is it owned by Department heads or simply the CFO
- Does Organization have a Mission/values
- Is leadership top down or wide and deep or in between. Which way does it lean?
- Is Organization customer centric or staff or shareholder centric
- How strong are the silos? Is their collaboration between silos? Do an “audit of collaboration”

**Mission statements and corporate values are something that you have championed as crucial to any business, yet we still see many entrepreneurs and businesses charge on ahead without much thought for these fundamental elements. What does it mean to create a mission and values framework and what do you see as the key benefits to investing the time to get this right?**

I believe good leaders align people around shared Mission and Values. They empower people to lead and serve other stakeholders. A mission statement is the start of a great strategy that sets an organizational Agenda and a structure or template to build around.

For us the Mission and Values describe “The Geelong Way” from which we build our entire organization.

Every employee should know how they fit and contribute to the Mission

Entrepreneurs often want to do “deals” that are often substantial and noticed but they don’t necessarily develop “substance” in an organization which gives it sustainability and strength. We need to add layers to an organization so that it continues to matter to the community or to the world

Often when an organization is to be sold quickly the owner cuts as much cost out of the organization including all that supports a good culture . I build organisations that try to last.



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**The 'culture' of business is something that is popping up more frequently and something that you are a firm believer in. How do you go about creating the right business culture and how do you ensure that not only do you get the initial buy in from the entire organisation, but also maintain the belief and the ongoing application of the values that support that culture?**

You must first decide on what your values should be. It must be an inclusive process. Ask your people what behaviors if consistently shown would mean outstanding success for the organization, define them and place a title on them e.g. Team, Integrity, excellence, precision etc. Recruit for these values, reward the demonstration of these values, promote people with these values, places these values into performance reviews

**You are considered as one of the great sports administrators in this country and a genuine leader in your field. You have also seen many great leaders on the field, from John Worsfold and Guy McKenna to Tom Harley to Joel Selwood. What do you think makes a great leader and is it something that you are born with or something that can ultimately be learned?**

I explained before that I believe a good leader is authentic, aligns people around shared mission and values, empowers his co leaders to lead, serves other stakeholders and collaborates with so many relevant others. I believe leadership can be learned and that we change as leaders as we get older, experience more and gain more skills. I think we need to ask ourselves what will keep me relevant and required, what unique skills or traits do I have that will give me leadership longevity and assist my organization in gaining competitive advantage.

**Technology is starting to play a big role in sports of all levels, from the weekend warrior to the elite individual and teams. Where do you see the role of technology in the future, particularly in relation to its application to performance at the elite level?**

I think we are all on a flight to and for innovation and quality data. Technology can assist in this flight. I think its ultra important to try to define what the Organisation KPIs are and ensure your IT systems work toward giving you precise and quick feedback, eg for our coaches to gain feedback on our on field KPIs in real time right through our game. Or simply receiving accurate and quick feedback on our financial positions.

**There are plenty of big personalities and egos in football. How do you manage said egos and in particular how do you effectively manage conflict in the workplace?**

I start with the premise that high performance is about meeting commitments (goals) and in doing so carrying out the right behaviours (values). We don't need big egos, poor values even if our employees are meeting other targets. We say to such people "change or leave". We place a lot of support around such people in their transition but if they don't change they go! I have learned not to fall in love with talent too quickly only to find out the work ethic is not there or they don't team well or respect enough!! I always loved visiting my former Chairman's work place (Frank Costa) who has a large reception sign , "Character first, Talent second"!



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**Whether it be on or off field, creating the right team is crucial to success. How do ensure you are building the right team around you and what tips do you have for finding the right people for your organisation?**

I search for people with great character and some talent, their values must align with my organization, particularly around collaboration and teamwork. They must have the ability to be as selfless as possible and their leadership is mostly about the people they lead and not about themselves.

**Finally, as a successful businessman, what are your top three tips for organisational success?**

1. Have a Business Plan with shared Mission, Vision, KPIs, Values, Key strategies and budget. Make sure it is owned and understood by all.
2. Add meaningful layers to your organization so it continues to matter
3. Do what you say you will do