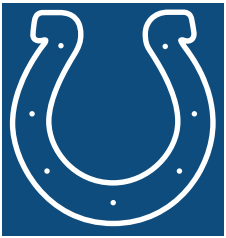




LESSONS **from** **the** GRIDIRON

By Theresia Whitfield



IT SEEMED LIKE A DREAM; a completely surreal experience. There was Tony Dungy, head coach for the Indianapolis Colts lifting the Lombardi trophy over his head; partly to honor the men who fought so hard to earn that trophy but also to praise the God who brought them to that place.

We've all seen athletes extend their thanks to God for "letting me win." And then we, sadly, read about that same athlete as he is arrested for drug possession, spousal abuse, or some other less-than-Christian activity. It's gotten to the point where it gives us all pause when an athlete—or anyone for that matter—proclaims their faith in such a public manner.

Yet, no one really questioned Tony Dungy. Some have complained about his soulful expressions and accolades to the God who created him. In fact, some have wondered why God let the Colts win the Super Bowl while He let the Bears lose. Did Lovie Smith's prayers fall on deaf ears? Does God care more about the Colts' offense than the Bears' defense? It isn't quite that simple. Let Coach Dungy spell it out for you:

"The Lord doesn't always take you in a straight line. He doesn't always take you on a direct path," Dungy recently said. "I think he tests you sometimes to see if you're going to keep the faith and hang in there."

And test you He does, just as He did with Tony Dungy and the Indianapolis Colts. But just what can we learn from Dungy's trials and ultimate victory?

TEACH, DON'T TERRORIZE

Tony Dungy and Bears head coach Lovie Smith may have paved the way for a new breed of coaches. Many coaches of years gone by, and some still today, use terrorism tactics and boot-camp style training to "encourage" their players to give it their all. For some it has worked quite well. And yet, here are two coaches showing that barking, screaming, cursing,

and throwing things are less than adult-like, less than manly, and not very productive.

"I've heard it said once that you had to be obsessed to win a Super Bowl," said Colts general manager Bill Polian, who hired Dungy in 2002. "I think nothing could be further from the truth. Tony is obsessed with nothing except his faith and his family."

Dungy's style works because he is a great teacher who projects a father-figure image. Players don't want to let him down.

Both Dungy and Smith, who first worked with Dungy as a linebacker coach at Tampa Bay, say they recognize that men should be treated as men and that if you treat them with respect, they'll do whatever you ask.

And so it is with our work environment. Take a lesson from the gridiron: Teach, don't terrorize.

SOWING THROUGH PAIN

Tony Dungy has also learned the value of delayed gratification. Sometimes God's timing isn't quite the same as ours, no matter how much of a fit we pitch.

Everyone said that last year was the year for the Colts to win it. They were a near-perfect team, they would lose Edgerin James after the season, and it was appropriate to have a happy ending to Tony Dungy's sad year.

Dungy lost his 18-year old son, James, just three days before Christmas in 2005. James committed suicide. It is for that reason, and so many others, that Dungy has devoted much of his time to helping young men find the right kind of mentor in a world filled with not-so-many bright examples. He is also the lead speaker for All Pro Dad, an organization he helped launch in 1997 as a resource for men who want to become better fathers. (Since then, Tony has helped recruit more than 40 NFL coaches, players and alumni who speak out about the role of the father in families.)

And it was Dungy's faith that got him through that difficult road. Not long after his son's death, Dungy spoke at the annual Athletes in Action Super Bowl Breakfast.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

THE LORD DOESN'T ALWAYS TAKE YOU ON A STRAIGHT LINE.





He commented on the toll his son's death had on him: "People ask how I could come back to work so soon. I'm not totally recovered. I don't know if I ever will be. It's still very painful."

And yet, there he was, on the sideline coaching the other men in his life. They didn't make it to the Super Bowl last season. But it was

all in God's plan.

"I know God bonded us as such a tight team and looked after us on this journey," said Colts owner, Jim Irsay.

Another lesson from the gridiron: Don't let disappointment or tragedy untie the ties that bind you to God and to your fellow team members at work.

GET OUT OF THE CLOSET

Everyone knows it has been Dungy's faith that has kept him on the football field, mentoring men on and off the football field.

Some pundits—or as they like to call themselves, journalists—decided his outcry of faith after winning the Super Bowl. Some preferred that he milk the race card instead of the religion card. One journalist even wrote: "His religious expression even trumped his honor at being the history-setting first African-American coach to win a Super Bowl."

But even the biggest Naysayer—until the Colts actually won the Super Bowl—CBS analyst and former NFL quarterback Boomer Esiason, was touched. "You can say what you

want about the born-again thing," he said of Dungy. "Whether you like it or don't like it, that's inconsequential. The fact is that man is who he is because of that faith."

Next lesson from the gridiron: Let your faith shine, even at the office. Remember, people are watching, and you never know whose heart will be forever changed.

BE PLIABLE

Once Dungy joined the Colts, he adjusted his conservative, defense-leading style to match that of the personnel on hand. Rather than forcing players and coaches to conform to his previous preferences, he did what was right for the entire organization and ultimately extended his streak of playoff berths.

Lesson from the gridiron: You don't have to change your business strategy, but consider adjusting how you relate to your staff in such a way that will benefit you, your staff and your company.

GO HOME

Phil Simms started the tradition after winning Super Bowl XXI. When someone asked Simms, quarterback of the New York Giants, what he was going to do next, he commented: "I'm going to Disneyland."

Dungy was asked the same question after his big Super Bowl win, and while he did eventually go to Disneyland, he simply replied, "I'm going home to be with my family."

Last lesson from the gridiron: Go home to be with your family. **CP**

Theresa Whitfield is a freelance writer and owner of Fletcher Communications, a company providing writing and public relations services. She lives in Zionsville with her husband, dog, and cat.



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