Twitter Thread by Steve Magness



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The "tough/hardass" coaching model occasionally works on the HS/college level because athletes have no control.

It largely fails on the pro level because athletes have more autonomy & understand their value

Pro's want to be treated as people, not subordinates.

Why? A thread:

It's not that young athletes don't want the same things (autonomy) as older. It's that there's an inherent power differential and they are nearly powerless to escape it.

They "survive" the 'tough' training, they don't thrive under it.

Human motivation is very simple. Self Determination Theory boils it down to 3 basic needs:
1. Feel like you belong
2. Feel like you can make progress
3. Feel like you have some control over your life (autonomy)

Intrinsic motivation largely fuels the "obsession" you see from top performers to practice their craft over and over.

That doesn't come from a coach or someone dictating and directing. Over the long haul, it has to come from within.

As you can see, the "hardass" all the time approach runs counter to at least one of our basic motivational needs.

Over time, you erode self-motivation and have to replace it with something else, or else you lose people.

That something else if often more extrinsic motivation.

I like to think of extrinsic motivation as a temporary booster. There's nothing wrong with it, but it's like throwing lighter fluid on the fire. You may need some from time to time, but it burns quickly and burns out. You need something more sustainable over the long haul.

All of this is why the 'tough' all the time approach generally only works if you are consistently winning or there's a finite time in which an athlete has to tolerate it.

A high chance to win supplements some of the lost motivation, temporarily at least.

A short period to tolerate (i.e. college career) with a potential big payoff at the end (i.e. get drafted) helps athletes get through it.

But as I said, you have to replace that loss of motivation provided via autonomy with something. And that something often is short term.

If you think this if gibberish, consider a study a few years ago using NBA coaches/players.

They found that having an "abusive leader" as a coach changed the trajectory of players careers.

They had more technical fouls and worse performance over the trajectory of their career.

It's worth emphasizing that this didn't occur only while they were being coached by an "abusive leader," it impacted the rest of their career.

Players trajectories, in terms of player efficiency metrics, shifted downwards
https://t.co/dqpknRc3vc

All of the above is one of the reasons you see college coaches who have excelled at that level using a control/disciplinarian style fail at the pro level. It doesn't translate.

The style wears on you. It pushes you away from intrinsic motivation.

The same lessons apply off the court and field. If you have talented and driven individuals, the quickest way to turn them into complacent, "lazy" workers is to diminish their intrinsic motivation by taking away their basic psychological needs.

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