



Front Line Leadership Program

Insights from our Olympic Eyes Onsite

“Olympic insights especially for Front Line Leaders... and also for the rest of us!”

While we have been glued to the spectacular scenery, the spectacle, the excitement, and the passion that has played out over the past two weeks at the Vancouver Olympics – Linda Cuthbert, the leader of our Consortium-developed Front Line Leadership training – has been our eyes and ears.

From her onsite perspective, she shares with us some of the insights we may have missed as she brings us messages from the dramatic performances we have watched.


The new – **12th intake of Front Line Leaders (FLL) program** – begins this Tuesday, March 2nd. It will contain some unique insights into leadership and achievement provided by a person who is recognized as a National Diving Champion. Here are some of her observations of the Vancouver Olympics – and the messages that can be taken from them...~ *Dave Hogg*

Linda Cuthbert...


“Sitting in a sea of red and white and singing the national anthem with 16,000 people at Canada Hockey Place following the women’s gold medal game... Feeling the anguish of Joannie Rochette as she soldiers on just days after the death of her mother... Sharing the joy of Clara Hughes as she caps her stellar career with yet another Olympic medal...”

After soaking in the Olympic spirit for almost 2 weeks, I now prepare to return home.


And as I turn my mind to the new group of people starting the Front Line Leadership course, I offer some Olympic insights for those leaders in their daily pursuit of creating a lean environment and continuous improvement culture.

 The volunteers, security personnel, bus drivers and other front line people here in Vancouver have been fantastic. They have moved tens of thousands of people safely and efficiently and they did it in a way that made it fun for everyone. Their enthusiasm and commitment to their job have been infectious and have left a lasting impression on the millions of people who visited.


It may be the executive leaders who determine the strategic vision and brand, but it is the people on the front lines who bring the brand to life. They set the tone and mood for employees and customers alike.

 “*I believe*” is the tag line created by the broadcast partner for these games, one that spectators and athletes embraced. Athletes have said that this belief was contagious, that the support of the spectators, and knowing that Canadians believe in them, has been a positive force in their performance.


For Front Line Leaders, your deeply held beliefs about the people you lead and work with are also contagious and influence their performance outcomes. Medal performances can only be realized when those around them believe in their success.

 Joannie Rochette was able to block out the thoughts of her mother’s death to focus on performing her skating program. The women’s hockey team had to push aside the fierce pressure and focus on the play. Athletes have an intense ability to focus. They push aside a pressure while simultaneously using it to energize them. They have to be absolutely in the moment while simultaneously holding in the back of their minds the ultimate objective or the time they need to beat. This is what I call bi-focal vision.


In the FLL course, we address the need for Front Line Leaders to have bi-focal vision—the need to focus on every step in the process while constantly ensuring they are aligned with the larger objectives. Olympic athletes are champions in doing this.

 Athletes visualize success. Just prior to hurtling their bodies down the mountain, you can see the skiers visualizing every turn.


Images are the language of the brain. High performing leaders are ones who not only visualize success themselves, but are able to clearly paint a picture of success and inspire those they lead. Athletes do this repeatedly and Front Line Leaders are no different in the need to continually imagine and describe what success looks like.

 A recent evening I found myself at Cypress Mountain watching the women aerial skiers. What a spectacular event. I have a new appreciation for these athletes and their feats - how high they leap off those ramps, the number of twists and turns in the air, and how hard they hit the ground when they land. As fog descended on the venue I wondered how the athletes could still perform their jumps with such reduced visibility.

Front Line Leaders often have to act or make decisions with-out being able to see the full picture or without having all the information. It really comes down to practice, developing the habits and muscle memory to be able to perform in less than ideal circumstances.

 The athletes' goals at these Olympics ranged from achieving a personal best to being the world's best. Some of their goals may have been seen as unrealistic when they first set them but they use that goal to motivate themselves and drive their performance to higher levels.

Front Line Leaders also set goals with input from their teams and use these goals to focus on priorities and achieve results that otherwise may have been seen as unachievable.

 Every athlete has a coach who helps them set goals, guides their training program, and provides meaningful feedback. Also, coaches help them remove the barriers inhibiting performance – sometimes those barriers are external but more often coaches help their athletes remove the internal barriers – the thought processes, self talk, belief system, assumptions – in the athletes' mind.

Front Line Leaders need to play this role with the people they lead – asking questions to stretch thinking, challenge assumptions, encourage possibility thinking.

How often have we heard at these Olympics, athletes attribute their success to their coaches and all those who supported them?

And, of course, we've seen a lot at these Olympics about celebrating – celebrating goals, celebrating personal bests, celebrating team, and celebrating pride!

Celebrating brings people together.

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