

LeadershipFAQs

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WINNING STYLE

An interview with Mike Scioscia,
Manager, Anaheim Angels

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By Michele Himmelberg**

Mike Scioscia's approach to his team contains valuable lessons for other leaders - even if their charges aren't Angels.

You have a lousy month and can't hit your sales quota. You make a mistake and lose confidence. A deadline looms and you struggle to finish a big project. These are times when you need your manager's patience, reassurance and belief that you'll come through.

That's exactly what Angels manager Mike Scioscia has delivered this year as the baseball team stumbled through a 6-14 start, lost key players in slumps and snatched a playoff spot in the last week of the season. Through it all Scioscia has learned how to reach inside and find the passion of each of his players.

The team rewarded his faith by earning the Angels' first post-season berth in 16 years - -a

series against the New York Yankees that begins Tuesday.

Twice a world champion, and a major-league catcher for 15 years, Scioscia commanded respect. But it took more than possessing knowledge; he had to pass it on. An excellent communicator, Scioscia knows how to be funny and when to be tough. He has preached "one win at a time" so consistently that his team trusts his philosophy.

Now Major League Baseball is whispering Scioscia's name for Manager of the Year honors.

What's good for the Angels could also be good for teams in offices, manufacturing plants and warehouses all over Orange County. Scioscia paused during the playoff run to talk about what he does in baseball and what every boss would like to do: Coach the most out of your talent.

Q: Management gurus say the core of good coaching is to sincerely believe in the innate greatness of employees. Is it the same in baseball? How do you do that?

A: If you don't believe that you're going to succeed, and that your players have the ability to perform at a certain level, then I don't think you ever will. In a tremendously competitive industry, whether it's baseball or business, the players have to feel your support and believe that they are something special, or they'll never reach their potential. As a manager, I have to be exuding that on a daily basis, and if I am, it permeates to those who are competing on the field. If you help a player understand they have a talent they can achieve, then they'll be self-motivated and play more consistently.

Q: You don't rip your players in the press, or criticize them in public. But you were firm and direct in a closed-door team meeting this week. How much of managing is how you communicate?

A: If you look at what a manager's job description is, one thing that has to be near the top is communication. Managers are people, too, and we all have our own style and different methods of trying to get the most out of the talent that is assembled. But the common denominator is communication. If you don't communicate on a daily basis, then you're going to have some issues to deal with that will make you a less-effective manager, and that means less production from your group.

Q: You spent 15 years as a player, winning, losing and battling through injuries. Now, observers say you're unflappable. Does that on-field experience make you a better manager?

A: A lot of what prepares you to be a manager is on-the-job training. There's no school you go to. But you have to have the skills to understand leadership and how to keep a team focused on a daily basis. Where it has helped me is on the patience side of it. Having played this game on a high level, I know it's very difficult. So if a player has a rough streak, or the team's in a rough spell, you try to avoid knee-jerk reactions that might take you down an even tougher road.

Patience helps you clarify the situation, so you can make a better decision.

Q: When the team was 6-14 in April, and when they had to win a game this week, you never lost your cool. How hard was it to stay calm?

A: Obviously you keep your ear to the railroad track in a situation like that, trying to evaluate the best course of action. If you have a team that has every part working and you're 6-14, that's one thing. But if a club is running on three of eight cylinders, you have to sit back and say, 'Let's get the team healthy and in line and then see what changes we need.'

Q: Business theory says that to manage a team, you first build relationships with individuals. How does that work in baseball?

A: Absolutely we work on a team concept but to really define a person's role and how they fit, you have to find and touch the passion they have to play. If you can connect with their love to compete, that passion, a lot of the rest is almost self-healing. Guys will find their roles, and you'll put them in positions where they can reach their talent level. Once that happens, the whole scope of the team takes shape. Absolutely, you have to make some tough decisions. A player thinks his role should be expanded, and you think the other way. But the team is the

No. 1 priority. It might mean that some excellent hitters get less playing time in other situations. Sometimes individual sacrifice can be better for the team, and players understand that if they feel you're driven towards what, hopefully, is a championship season.

Q: What advice would you give to Orange County's managers?

A: You have to temper the drive to succeed with the patience needed to let good things develop. I think patience in this position certainly relieves pressure on a club - or people - from sources that can creep into a day-to-day work environment. Our jobs are filled with enough pressure. A manager's job is to take that out of the equation, so the talent can perform at a critical time. Part of being a manager is based on the experiences you've had and your personality. You have to stay true to what's in your heart to be the best you can be. I've had some good times and some rough times already, and being true to who you are is essential.

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