



THE MANAGER

**INSIDE THE MINDS OF
FOOTBALL'S LEADERS**

MIKE CARSON

B L O O M S B U R Y

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of Football's Leaders

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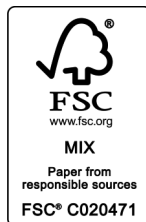
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FOREWORDS

An intensely contested environment, where the competition constantly strive to outwit, outperform and beat your best endeavours. Where the will to succeed is just the beginning and the positive combination of a hundred small differences can be the deciding factor between winning and losing. Where the investment in culture, training and implementation of the game plan are crucial. Where results are judged in the harsh light of a few numbers and the best talent available is rare, highly mobile and in increasing demand.

Elite football management... or familiar aspects of managing in the corporate world today?

This is a rare book. It looks through the eyes of the people who manage some of the most high-profile football clubs in the world and asks: how do they navigate these challenges, how do they motivate their teams to achieve tremendous success and overcome underperformance? It's an unprecedented glimpse behind the curtain at the true role of the manager.

Louis Jordan
Vice Chairman and Partner, Deloitte

FOREWORDS

What does it take to be a good leader? Whether it is business, or football, leadership is an important quality if you want to succeed. There have been a myriad of management books talking about leadership in abstract terms. But what better way to learn about real leadership skills than by reading what people like Sir Alex Ferguson, Arsène Wenger and José Mourinho say on this complex subject.

Barclays operates in over 50 countries and employs nearly 150,000 people, so effective leadership in a global business such as ours is essential to sustained success.

We have been global title sponsor of the Barclays Premier League and lead sponsor of the League Managers Association since 2001 so we are delighted to also support this book.

Mike Carson has been able to draw on some of the most successful and best known managers in football, yet they all have very individual views about what leadership means to them, and how they get the best out of their teams. What is clear from this book is that there are traits that all great managers share: passion for the game and the drive to continuously improve.

I hope you enjoy the book.

Antony Jenkins
Barclays Group Chief Executive

FOREWORDS

1992 witnessed the birth of two great football institutions, the Barclays Premier League and the League Managers Association. In the 21 years that have followed, we have worked extremely hard to look after our members – the current and former managers from the 92 professional football clubs in England – to protect their welfare and represent their collective voice. As a group, these managers have a vast wealth of accumulated knowledge and experience, acquired by managing many thousands of games at the very highest level. During this time, through the LMA's work in supporting its members, we have slowly and painstakingly earned their trust, their respect and their confidence. A priceless by-product of this process has been unprecedented access into their extremely private and personal world.

Since our beginning, the education and development of our members, and prospective members, has been a responsibility we have taken very seriously. In this respect, one of our major objectives has been to meticulously research and identify those characteristics and traits common to the best of the best. Our findings leave us in absolutely no doubt; the quality which sets apart the very best from the rest is 'leadership'. The best managers are passionate about football, obsessed and driven by the need to manage and succeed. Without exception, they also share a crystal-clear sense of where they are going; they know and understand how they will get there; and they have that precious ability to get inside the hearts and minds of those they work with and convince them to follow. They all possess an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, a passion for learning, and a willingness to successfully adapt to changing times and circumstances. In addition, they all have a huge generosity in their willingness to share information for the benefit of those taking their first treacherous steps up the slippery slope of football management. It is this willingness to

FOREWORDS

share that has enabled the LMA to methodically develop our own Leadership Education Programme, 'Survive, Win, Succeed', as we have sought to ensure that all our members receive the best possible start to their careers.

We are therefore extremely proud and delighted that this, our first book, has set the bar so high. The managers and former managers who have contributed to this book have amassed in excess of a staggering 15,000 competitive matches between them and along the way have accumulated every major domestic trophy available in their respective European competitions. Their success is due – in part at least – to their awareness that a football manager has to be more than what we traditionally understand the term 'manager' to mean, and to their ability to encompass aspects of leader, father figure, coach, and psychologist roles into their daily work. It is a complex job, all the more impressive for being carried out under the unique, relentless public scrutiny that accompanies their every move. Season after season, their unique skills enable them to transform vision into reality. Season after season, they are tasked to make the aspirations and dreams of millions come true, and they do.

I thank all those who have contributed so generously to this very special book – including Mike Carson, whose energy and enthusiasm have been boundless – and I hope that you enjoy its content and the unique insights it offers into the hitherto very private workings of the football manager's mind and into that hallowed place that is the professional football dressing room.

Howard Wilkinson

Chairman, League Managers Association

www.leaguemanagers.com

June 2013

PREFACE

Football as a sport and more broadly as an industry is unique – in the breadth of its appeal, the scale of its support and its ability to generate emotion. For generations, the game has created extraordinary memories, offering us visions of sublime skill and moments of great passion. It has also generated pain and anguish, and tragically has known its own human disasters. Across the world, it both divides and unites people of different races, nationalities and every conceivable status. It is the sport of rulers and workers, of children and the elderly.

In Britain, the people with the task and privilege of leading football at the front line are the managers. In fact, their role has only a little to do with management, and much more to do with leadership. The men who lead in the upper reaches of professional British football – especially in the world-famous Barclays Premier League – are truly extraordinary. The work they do is intensive, personal, technical and critical – critical to the success of their teams, the growth of their clubs and the happiness of many. It is also subject to intense public scrutiny: their every move – whether witnessed, surmised or merely imagined – is subject to widespread analysis in almost every forum imaginable, from bar rooms through offices to internet blogs and live television and radio broadcasts.

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My intention is this book will appeal to many people from different camps. At one level, it is simply a book for all football managers – both serving and aspiring. It brings together insights from the collective wisdom of almost 30 people at the very top of their game. At another level, it is written for leaders in all fields of endeavour: business, education, government, non-profit, the arts – any context where individuals lead other individuals and teams in their pursuit of meaning and success. My own work is with business leaders, enabling them to lead from their deep strengths, and I know that there is real value for them in this book. This is not to say that any one manager has all the answers – or even that the full cohort has cracked it between them. But there is a set of circumstances from which emerges a compelling language of leadership that will be useful to leaders in any and every setting and culture. And at a further level, the book is written unashamedly for the football fan: the men and women who love the game, and who – like me – are simply fascinated by the challenge and want to know how and why these people do what they do.

These managers are fascinating. For the most part, they are true natural leaders. One of them commented to me: ‘You have the harder task. I just have to do this stuff – you have to explain it! I just do it all by intuition.’ This may be simple modesty, but there is a considerable element of truth in it – and this perhaps explains the appeal of the book. It is written as a first-hand insight into what these leaders think, feel and do to lead in this most dramatic and demanding of settings.

In writing, I have made extensive use of the voices of the managers themselves who I was lucky enough to interview in depth through the 2012–13 season. As the work progressed, powerful themes emerged: in every case I have sought to surface, illustrate and simplify these themes so that we can all come away with practical and helpful

PREFACE

ways of thinking. My intention is for the leaders among you to identify within these pages some of your own struggles, challenges and successes, and to create a language from this that will enhance your own practices. For the fans among you, I hope you will join me in appreciating the enormous complexity of the task that our often-criticised managers undertake. And for the football managers and coaches among you, I intend it to be an interesting and memorable take on how some of the great leaders achieve success.

I would also like to acknowledge the excellent work of the League Managers' Association. In providing a professional home for its members, it is taking the art of leadership in football on to excellence. The LMA's own leadership model, emerging at the time of this publication, is perceptive and valuable. As it evolves, it will become a very valuable tool for the profession for generations to come.

Hope Powell, manager of the England women's team since 1998, has made an important contribution to this book and a huge contribution to leadership in the sport overall. As an important point of style, in all cases except for Powell, I have used the masculine pronouns of he, him and his. This is because the book is focused almost exclusively on experiences of Premier League leaders past and present, and the Premier League at the level of players and managers is an exclusively masculine environment. This issue of style in no way passes comment on the abilities of the rapidly growing body of women leaders in football or elsewhere.

Finally, it has been a personal joy to work with the LMA and the managers themselves on this project. You have been generous with your time and your insights; and I have been struck by your humility. Thank you.

Mike Carson
June 2013

PART ONE

The Scale of the Task

CHAPTER ONE

A PIECE OF THE ACTION

THE BIG IDEA

Professional football is a crucible. Working inside that crucible, the managers of the 20 Barclays Premier League clubs in England have their leadership publicly examined, challenged, lauded and ridiculed on a daily basis. Some of us feel we could do a better job if asked. Others stand back in admiration of the great achievers, and cast a sympathetic backward glance at the ones who look like they've failed. But we actually have very little appreciation of the full scope of their work.

The role of a leader in Premier League football is fascinating, complex and tough. Fantasy football leagues may convince us that it's about buying players and selecting a team. In reality it is about creating winning environments, delivering on enormous expectations, overcoming significant challenges, handling pressure and staying centred throughout – a set of challenges familiar to leaders in all sectors.

There are plenty of people with influence around the managers – all of them having or wanting a piece of the action: owners, fans and the general public, media, the players of course, and now the agents. This massive, global interest in top-level professional football is what sustains the game. But although the influence of these various parties may be welcome – and even necessary – they pose an ever-present challenge to the managers. So how do the managers cope?

THE MANAGER

Roy Hodgson is a football manager of considerable international standing. Since his early 20s he has been passionate about coaching and about the global nature of football. Since beginning his work in earnest in Sweden at the age of 29, he has accumulated and deployed a wide range of experience, leading 16 teams in eight countries over 37 years—including four national teams (Switzerland, the UAE, Finland and most recently his native England).

In Sweden, he is widely acclaimed as one of the architects of the national game, introducing new thinking and styles with great success in his 12 years at Halmstads BK, Örebro SK and Malmö FF. At Malmö he led the club to domestic dominance and unprecedented European achievement – even defeating the Italian champions Inter Milan in the European Cup. In Switzerland, he transformed the national side into genuine performers on the world stage. Under Hodgson they achieved World Cup qualification for the first time in 28 years, Euro qualification in 1996 and, at their peak, third place in the world rankings.

Roy Hodgson's leadership has since been pressure tested in the toughest of club settings: the Italian Serie A with Inter Milan and the Barclays Premier League with Blackburn Rovers, Fulham, Liverpool and West Bromwich Albion. Among these, his greatest impact came at Fulham: he joined them in a mid-season relegation battle in late 2007, led them to safety that season, took them to a club record seventh in the following year and led them to a Europa League final the year after, defeating Juventus and the German champions Wolfsburg along the way. They lost the final in the last moments to Atlético Madrid. His achievements with Fulham that season saw Hodgson recognised by his managerial peers when he was voted the League Managers Association Manager of the Year.

Previously holding a greater reputation outside his own country than inside, his coaching skills and leadership talent were fully recognised in 2012 when he was appointed manager of the England national team to succeed Fabio Capello.

His Philosophy

Hodgson is a thoughtful and focused leader who operates along simple and clear lines: ‘The manager is employed to coach a football team. That has to be his primary focus. So I concentrate for the most part on the team: making sure they are prepared for the challenge ahead. After that it’s about compartmentalising. The owner has employed me; and the fans are the people whose interest in the game has generated my job and my players’ jobs. We must never lose sight of that, but you can’t work for the fans or even just for the chairman. The only way you can satisfy both parties is to do your job well and win.’ Simple focus: team first, then each other party in turn, giving them real attention.

But this elegant approach conceals a raft of challenges. What are the realities of life in this high-octane environment? How do the successful managers – Hodgson and others – practically navigate such difficult territory?

Many Cooks

In business they’re called stakeholders. In football we might call them interested parties. Whatever we call them, they have always been there – since the beginning of the game there have always been those on the sidelines with an opinion.

A traditional snapshot of the game in say the 1970s would reveal the principal groupings as the chairman, the players, the fans, the press and the public. (There were always the governing bodies too,

but with little direct impact on the daily life of the manager.) Today the groupings are much the same. What has changed is the degree of influence and leverage they have. Take the chairman, for instance. In a game where cash is often king, the man who holds the purse strings has massive influence. He is, after all, the person ultimately responsible for hiring (and firing) the manager, and with the rise of the new all-powerful owner, these leaders are becoming public figures in a much more dramatic way than ever before.

Other groupings have also become more powerful in their own right. Top players whose predecessors would nervously approach their manager for a rise now get their agents involved in contracting stand-offs with millions of pounds at stake. The public who used to confine their conversations to bars and pubs now exert influence through social media. And members of the press, who used to be the guardians of footballing standards, are now influential enough to get a manager fired. For the managers themselves, this means a tough, multi-layered and often frenetic environment. Never have the principles of centredness, self-knowledge, handling pressure and personal renewal been so important.

The Centre of Authority

The prevalent model of organisation in the world's leading football clubs sees the manager as the centre of authority. Hodgson relishes this aspect of the role and considers it a privilege: 'The reward for success in our profession as a coach is to reach a position where you are that focal point, where you are the person that everyone – from board to fans – is looking to for what they all require: a team that wins football matches. You're the man who has been given the task of producing that team and organising that team – and it can't get much more important than that in football. What

is more important in a football club than the team that goes out every week and wins or loses? Manchester United today are a worldwide institution and they sold for hundreds of millions of pounds on the stock exchange. But the bottom line is, it's still those 13 or 14 players who run out every Saturday in a red shirt who are the essence of the business. If Manchester United spiral down into the second or third divisions of the Football League, then all of this will fly out of the window irrespective of how good they are commercially. So Alex Ferguson was a key, key figure, because he was the man who governed the core of the business for so long.'

Sir Alex Ferguson as much as anyone embodied this principle of central authority over the last 26 years at Old Trafford. 'I always remember starting at Manchester United. [Chairman] Martin Edwards said to me that the guiding principle of our football club is that the manager is the most important person at Manchester United. Everything is guided by what the manager thinks. There has never been an occasion in my time that the board has overruled the manager at any point on how you control the football club.' His great peer and rival in north London, Arsenal's Arsène Wenger, goes a step further. 'I don't think it can be the future of the manager to have no control, because the quality of the manager is basically determined by the quality of his control. How can you judge a manager if it is not for the fact that he controls the club? I believe that the manager is a strong guide inside the club. His players must have the feeling that as well as establishing authority, he has complete control. If the manager is not the most important man at the football club, then why do we sack the manager if it doesn't go well?'

Whatever the model of governance in a football club, the manager is invariably the pivotal figure. Hodgson feels the same responsibility applies to the manager of national teams: 'Managing

a national side brings its own challenges. The most obvious one is that I'm not with the players on the training field every day. I see them less often, and I have a wider selection pool [it's not about affordability]. My other big challenge, though, is the different demands on my time. I have time between matches, of course – the question is how best to use it. I like to give of myself and of my coaching experience to the federation and the country. I believe I should be involved in helping all interest groups through coaching schemes and programmes designed to produce coaches for the future.'

Whatever is going on – selection, injury, high achievement, low achievement, rumour – chairman, players, media and fans turn to him to make sense of it all. And not only is the manager key to the business success of the club – but as Hodgson points out, his influence can extend a long way beyond the current team: 'The manager's philosophy, if sufficiently clear and powerful, will filter down not only to his team, but also to other teams at all levels within his club's structure – and it might actually impregnate the whole club for a long, long period. We've seen lots of examples in the past of iconic football managers whose philosophy has actually led to the club adopting a certain style of football and projecting a particular image that the club itself is very proud of. This is true of iconic leaders everywhere, of course – great military leaders, great business leaders or political leaders whose character and philosophy can have a lasting effect on one or more nations.' Managers who started out as football coaches now find themselves at the very heart of a complex business. The coach has become a leader.

Gérard Houllier reinforces the point: 'There was a time when clubs thought that winning on the pitch was enough. Now times have changed and you need to win off the pitch as well – by

which I mean commercially. If the commercial aspect works, the club generates good revenues, and from that flow better facilities, better staff, better players and then again better revenues for the club. Then it's important that the technical part is there too – and this is also based upon very good human relationships. I think that a good club is a club that looks after its players, looks after its people, looks after its employees, its staff and everything. Its human atmosphere is to me the foundation for success. And it is the manager who is at the centre of that.' The familiar lesson of putting people first translates directly to organisations in just about every sector and industry; the leader who can focus on his people even in the whirlwind of wider stakeholder relationships is set up for success.

The Man in the Chair

'The single most important thing for a manager is the relationship with the owner of the football club.' So says Tony Pulis, former manager of Stoke City. Is this simply a case of 'The man who pays the piper calls the tune'? Or is it that the owner has the potential to disrupt the smooth running of the club? Either way, if the manager can win the trust of the owner, then he will be given the space and resources to pursue his philosophy. If not, then the owner is likely to intervene. It is, after all, his club. If the authority of the manager is tested, then it is his relationship with the chairman/owner that will most likely present the greatest challenge.

The rise of the powerful owner

The acquisition of Chelsea in 2003 by Roman Abramovich triggered across a decade a series of high-profile football club takeovers. The emergence of Manchester City as a new footballing power in

Europe has been driven by the Abu Dhabi United Group led by Sheikh Mansour. Similar investments by high-net-worth individuals have taken place at Paris St Germain, Malaga and elsewhere. Other clubs in the Premier League, while not in the hands of a single individual, are owned by large organisations led by salient people. These owner-chairmen control the flow of funds around the club, including all that is needed for transfers and salaries. Sir Alex Ferguson represents many who have genuinely mixed feelings: 'In England, you had a generation of people who were fans who stood in the stand, and when they became successful their dream was to buy the club. That period looks to have gone and has been replaced by a generation of people coming in with different motivations. With some of them it is to make money, with some it is for the glory. To have more money in the league is good because you want to be the strongest league in the world. But it is very important that the structure of the game is not destroyed and that the pressure on salaries does not become ridiculous because the inflation pressure of too much money coming in at one time can be very destabilising for the players. For example, if a player is paid 1 and then is offered 5 somewhere else, he may want to stay but want 3. So then you go from 1 to 3, and the direct consequence is that all the other players go up as well – so it puts a huge pressure on the club's resources.'

As Sir Alex points out, huge sums of money can be destabilising. Yet, for the managers working with the investment, there is clearly enormous potential to create something special. Carlo Ancelotti describes enjoying the great freedom provided by the new owners at Paris St Germain: 'The owner recently bought the club and they are changing everything. They changed 12 players. They have good ambition. We have to build a team, and the club want to be competitive in Europe. This is a very good challenge. The owner is young, very ambitious, very calm, not afraid or worried if you

don't win a game; he is looking forwards. They are very focused on their objective – to be competitive in the future. This is difficult to explain to the media, because the media are thinking if we don't win there is no future. The first season's objective was to play in the Champions League. Then, in the summer, to buy some players to increase the quality of the team, to invest money for the next five years and to build the new training ground. The objective is very, very clear. If we win or don't win it doesn't matter. This is rare, and I hope that they will stay focused in this way.' At PSG Ancelotti and his club's owners achieved something important, which culminated in PSG winning the French Ligue 1 title at the end of Ancelotti's second season in charge: a truly shared vision, shared responsibility for delivering on that vision, and clarity around what success looks like. For a leader, this is extremely empowering. Because he has both clarity and trust, he can pursue his philosophy with confidence, and without looking over his shoulder. This gives purpose and stability to the organisation as a whole.

Roy Hodgson, while acknowledging the shift in nature of the high-profile, high-net-worth owner/chairmen of today, makes two significant observations. First, it remains a relationship game; and second, the onus – at least initially – is on the owner to get it right. 'In the past the chairman of a football club would be a local figure, a local businessman who would have been brought up with that club and had the club in his blood. But he had the capacity to have a good, bad or indifferent relationship with his appointed manager – just like any owner today. That hasn't changed. This is all about personalities, the personality of the owner and of the manager/coach. What has changed is the scale of wealth some owners bring. But if they are going to have success with their club, they must choose their manager very wisely, work with him and give him the support he needs. They will only get success for themselves through

success of the team, and success for the team is going to come through the man who leads and manages the players. He is the one who will mould the team, i.e. bring the right players to the club and coach them to play in a way that brings success.'

So the powerful owner is very much a part of modern football, and he has a great influence on the game. But to be successful, he needs a manager who can share his vision, convey it with clarity and passion, take ownership for outcomes and deliver on all his professional responsibilities in the face of enormous expectation.

Agents

The nature of the chairman himself is not the only evolution of the last 20 years. Harry Redknapp believes that, for managers, the rise of the player's agent is threatening not only the sacred bond between them and their players, but also the critical stability of their relationship with the chairman. 'If a player had a problem, he would come and see the manager and speak to the manager: "Why aren't I playing, gaffer? I think I should be in the team. What am I doing wrong? Why don't you give me a chance?" But they don't come and see you any more. Instead, the agents ring the chairman and complain that you aren't picking their player! Very, very few players knock on your door – they all go through their agent now. So agents build relationships with chairmen, not managers. They aren't silly, they know that the chairman owns the club and that managers come and go. This can be very undermining – and it's happening all the time. More and more chairmen are choosing players in the transfer window. In the past, players were chosen and the chairman wouldn't know anything until the player arrived! It's very different now.' It's in this climate that the critical relationship between manager and chairman needs to stay watertight.

When it all works

The owner-manager relationship is absolutely critical and can create or destroy a club's chances of success. Gérard Houllier tells how it can have a direct impact on team performance: 'I remember one specific moment when I came to a club part way through a season. I wondered after a few months if maybe the team was not clicking, or maybe the players were not playing for me. Particularly in the Barclays Premier League, the players play for the manager in some ways, so I thought that maybe because I had changed a few things they were not playing for us. So I went to the board and I explained that maybe we have to take some action. One of the board members stood up and said, "Well Mr Houllier. We don't have the best quality in the world, but there are two qualities we do have: patience and trust. We are patient and we will trust you do what you have to do." So when I left the board I went to my staff and I said, "Now we are going to start winning," and we won. Because the more the board trusts you, the more assertive and the more strong you will be in your management.' This is an excellent example. Martin O'Neill agrees: 'The owner-manager relationship is of paramount importance and I don't believe that can be underestimated.' Above all others, this relationship can be the most painful one for managers.

Pain

For Neil Warnock, the pain comes most of all from not being understood. 'I said to Amit Bhatia [QPR Director] when I left, "You don't really know what I've done at the club." I don't think people understand what managers do. Yes, they are managers, but they are also fathers, brothers and friends to everyone at the club. The way QPR is run I was actually sort of Mother Superior to

everybody, the cleaner included. I made everybody feel important and that's not easy to do. No disrespect, but you don't get that from a university. You can't put what we do behind the scenes into qualifications.'

And once the relationship between the manager and the chairman-owner is broken – as with many other relationships – it is hard to rebuild. Warnock says: 'I always work better when I work for one person who I trust totally. I have fallen out with a few chairmen in my career, but I only fell out with them when they lied to me. Once I felt that I'd lost trust in them, then I might as well have left. Once somebody lies to me or I lose trust in them, then I can never be committed to that same person again. When I left Sheffield United, the chairman – a friend of 17 years, I thought – came out and said on reflection he should have probably changed the manager. I had known this guy for 17 years and I rang him immediately and asked him why he said it. He said he was misquoted and he didn't mean to say anything like that. I told him I had heard it on the radio.'

The pain that comes from lack of appreciation and recognition is a significant challenge to managers. Many simply find they have to protect themselves. Sam Allardyce says: 'What happened at Blackpool taught me never to be sentimental and always get out when you're ready. I thought if I can get sacked by losing in the play-offs ... The year I took over, the club had finished fourth from bottom, just stayed up, the first year we finished 11th, the second year we finished third in the play-offs. We missed out on automatic promotion by a couple of points, we got beaten in the play-offs and I got sacked. So I said to myself if I got back into management I would never stay when it was the right time for me to leave. I wouldn't get emotionally involved in the football club and get talked into staying. And I played that out at Bolton and Notts County.'

So pain doesn't happen only with the high-profile clubs and their high-profile owners. Allardyce is more concerned about the young managers trying to make it work in the lower leagues: 'Some of the conflict I have had with owners and chairmen – it made you want to leave as quick as you could. I had to put up with it because I was making my way in management. It was brutal. Most managers still suffer the same now: the brutality, the bullying, the interference, the threats. It's a cruel and hard, hard world trying to make your way up as a manager. You come through that, you generally end up being a good leader.'

As with most high-profile relationships in business, politics or sport, the one between football chairman and manager is at the same time combustible and essential. Many will become strong; some never will. All require mutual commitment and effort to make them work – and a basic acknowledgement that both parties are human beings, often caught up in the emotion of the game.

Stability ...

Across the domains of club finance, governance and personal experience, the chairman can create either stability or instability for the manager and the club. Tony Pulis speaks enthusiastically of a relationship that fuelled the unexpected rise of Stoke City: 'My relationship with owner Peter Coates was paramount to everything that we achieved. He trusted me and I trusted him. Being a local Stoke businessman Peter was massively important to our progress. He had a dream to put Stoke City back on the map but to do it in a way that also brought the community closer to the football club.'

Howard Wilkinson contrasts his experiences as manager of Sheffield Wednesday and Leeds. 'Sheffield Wednesday were fifth or

sixth in the First Division when I was approached by Leeds, who were at the bottom of the second. The board at Sheffield Wednesday had dragged the club from the brink. But we got to the point when I said, “We need to invest now – I can’t keep squeezing juice out of these oranges. All the juice has gone. They just can’t come back next season and produce it again and again. We need to get better players.” And they said, “Howard, you know what our policy is – we can’t go down that road.”

‘When Leeds approached me, I met the chairman three or four times. Every time I met him it was a long meeting because I saw at Leeds the opportunity to go to a one-club town, with a chairman who was backing things with his own money. My message to him was, “I’ll come here if at the end of this long conversation you say yes. So it’s not me that’s going to say yes – you say yes.” So I put to him what I wanted to do and what I thought they could do. And it sounds ludicrous now, but the first part was five years and the second part was another five years and included everything – being promoted, winning the league, starting up an academy and so on. So by the time I’d got to that point I was starting to have very clear ideas about how I thought a successful club could be run. And he said yes. That was the start of an experiment, funded by him, which worked.’ This rare example of a vision set for the long term and faithfully executed over the long term lent unusual stability to the club.

Sharing a long-term vision is a sure-fire way to secure a long-term relationship – and, with it, stability for your organisation or team. Former Newcastle United and Manchester City manager Kevin Keegan will never forget the inspirational phone call he took in Marbella from Sir John Hall at Newcastle United, who said: ‘The two men who can save this club are talking to each other now.’ Pulis found similar inspiration. ‘I had just finished the season managing

Plymouth Argyle and was really enjoying it there. I was on holiday with my family when Peter Coates phoned me. He said to me, “I’m going to buy Stoke, but I will only buy it on one condition ... if you come back with me.” He described his vision for Stoke to me and what he thought the club could achieve if it was run properly throughout. A good few years before I was at the club the first time around, Peter hadn’t been treated very well by certain sections when he had been chairman. So I thought if he’s got the guts to do this then I should have the guts as well. In reality we were two really unpopular figures returning to the club – but I felt what he had outlined to me as the way forward made so much sense.’

Clarity of understanding and clear lines of responsibility make a big difference too. Allardyce’s successful relationship with the chairman at Bolton was founded on clarity. In 1999 when his long-standing friend and peer Brett Warburton became vice chairman and Phil Gartside became chairman, they established some clear ground rules. ‘Phil looked after the new stadium build and infrastructure; I looked after the football side. This wasn’t as easy as it sounds. The club had got into severe debt, so the business needed major restructuring and a new board. They recreated the business; I recreated the football. And I learned to speak their business language – which was important when it came to getting across my requests for investment. It was about making a business case based on success and working within budgets. If I could show I’d added an extra £2.5 million of value in a year, then I expected them to reinvest in the football.’

... and instability

By contrast, instability at the top creates anxiety and additional challenges that a highly operational leader does not need. Walter

Smith joined Everton from Rangers in 1998 but, pretty soon after, it all began to get tough. ‘The owner-chairman, Peter Johnson, had one or two problems just avoiding relegation the year before I arrived. He told me up front there would be money to invest in the team when, in fact, the reverse was true. After about two and a half months he sold a player without consulting me. Shortly after, he put the club up for sale and then effectively walked away. Only then did we all realise what a chaotic financial situation the club was in.

‘After he left, we had to sell nearly all the players that we had brought in. There was no transfer window then, so it was back and forward, bringing in players to cover for ones who were leaving. Then there was a new ownership. That new ownership was done on the back of a deal with NTL Communications. That fell through after two months, and we entered an unstable financial environment. That was where a little bit of anxiety crept in. I didn’t really have the confidence to say it’ll be OK in six months. I was there for three and a half years and it was pretty much a constant battle. Looking back on it just now I can say that I enjoyed it – more than I did at the time!’

Football stirs deep emotions for everyone involved. Players, staff and fans all feel pride and despair, strong attachment and overwhelming joy. They can also feel anger, resentment and pain. Allardyce recognises that owners and business leaders are susceptible to all of these feelings and more – and sometimes with difficult consequences: ‘They get the bug as much as we get it. They get the adrenalin rush, love it, can’t leave it alone, have to have it. High-powered businessmen find a new form that they have never experienced before in their life – and they can lose sight of where they were originally heading.’ Maintaining clarity of thought, perspective and long-term vision with such emotions at play is a challenge for a leader in any field.

Living on the edge

When the relationship between owner and manager is working, life is good. But success can be fleeting. In his second full season at the City of Manchester Stadium, Roberto Mancini's Manchester City were in the Premier League's pole position for much of the season. In late March his team slipped up and the pressure on him – real or perceived – increased significantly. It's at moments like these that the relationship is truly tested. Speaking at that time, Ancelotti understood the pressure Mancini was under: 'Everyone says that Mancini has to win; if he doesn't win this year it could be big problems. But the owner one week ago said he is happy with the performance of the team. The problem is in football that only one team wins.' He himself has had his tougher experiences. At Chelsea – unlike at PSG – he inherited a team that was 'fully ready'. He was sacked after two seasons, despite winning the league and cup double. He is philosophical, while admitting the pain of the experience. 'I didn't feel good. I think that I did my best, but I had a problem with the owner because the owner wanted more. This is normal, but I cannot do anything more.' Successful leadership under such intense personal pressure is no mean feat.

The art of leading upwards

If a football manager is to play his part in creating the stability he needs to function properly, then, as in most organisations, he will need to lead upwards. Leadership is rarely about some heroic 'follow me' message – it's more often about inspiring all round. And an important component of that is inspiring confidence, trust, excitement and commitment in the person or people under whose authority you stand yourself. Hodgson believes it begins with respect and pragmatism: 'You have to work on the basis that

the person at the top is there because he should be at the top, and even if he isn't, he's there anyway. It's a given. Then the three most important things he will need from anyone working together with him will be competence, diligence and communication. So when I have gone to football clubs, I have never really given serious thought to how I need to manage upwards – I've always concentrated on doing the job that I'm being paid to do. That's where the competence and diligence bit comes in. The communication point is all about speed of decision-making. We take a lot of decisions: every day the decision questions are flashed at you left, right and centre. The important thing is not to treat the club as purely your domain or to treat any questions about it as intrusive. The people running the whole show are responsible for the club surviving or not. They are entitled to ask questions. I have always tried to create a good line of communication upwards, provided the chairman wants that. You can't force it upon them, but I have always been pleased to get a call from the chairman asking how's it going and what's going on at the club because I think it's important for them to know.'

Choosing the right man for the job

Football managers like any other brand of leader all have their own style. Owner-manager relationships come in an infinite variety of textures, set as they are against variable and shifting landscapes. What is clear is that the successful owner will appoint an excellent manager, and one with whom he has natural chemistry; and the successful manager, once appointed, will devote considerable energy to making the relationship work – for the good of all at the club. 'Owners now are making massive investments in their clubs,' says Hodgson, 'so it is entirely reasonable that they may go for

high-profile managers with track records, no matter where they were born. People now quite happily realise that being English is in itself neither an advantage nor a disadvantage [for Premier League management] – in the same way that being Italian or French or any other nationality is neither an advantage nor a disadvantage. A manager can succeed or fail whatever his nationality. There is some interesting variety though that comes from cross-cultural appointments. While the actual job of coaching and managing a football team in terms of the physical and tactical side may not vary much, what can vary from culture to culture are the leadership qualities and characteristics required, and with those the ability to lead a team of people to success. Bob Houghton and I both used our own style to get to success in Sweden in the 1970s and 80s; Wenger and Mancini have been doing it recently in England.’

While Hodgson positively encourages the arrival in British football of high-profile managers from other countries, he reinforces the absolute need for skilled communicators: ‘Every day as coaches, we are in the communication business. In lower leagues we are also educators, but at the top end we work with people who know how to play superb football. I have been privileged to always work at the top end, so my work has been making sure that the skills and abilities the players have are blended together and are used purely and solely for the benefit of the team. And that’s where you come to the major leadership challenges: some of your players whose abilities are important to the club and the team are going to be ego-driven and insufficiently team orientated to bring those skills to the team itself. They might even destroy the team ethos because they are only interested in their own personal gain – they are in effect using the team. There are two types of players: the players who bring what they have to the team to make the team good, and players who use the team to make themselves look

good. When you encounter the second type, communication skills are absolutely critical if you are going to convince them that they are on the wrong road.'

The man in the middle of so many stakeholders needs excellent communication skills. The successful chairman will ensure this before he appoints a manager, and once he appoints, will trust his man and give him the space to use those skills to the full.

Governing Bodies

In addition to chairman/owners, modern football managers also have to deal with the governing bodies of the game. As a four-time national manager in very different geographies and 12-time club manager at very different clubs, Hodgson is well placed to address this topic.

First, the man at the top: 'The Football Association chairman is very much like the chairman at a club. But often clubs don't have large structures behind the chairman. Jack Walker owned Blackburn and had really set the club up as the Blackburn that we know today, Mohammed Al Fayed was the same at Fulham and Jeremy Peace the same at West Bromwich Albion. So it's a little bit different for David Bernstein than for those men who, as major stakeholders in a club, could basically bring people on board that suited them and could essentially do whatever they wanted. At the FA, David has to relate to a large board that represents the whole range of aspects of the game, and they have created a smaller Club England board who can deal rapidly with the operational issues as they arise, or form opinions to present to the main board in a formal way. Not unlike an executive team in business.'

So while the chairman can make a difference, it is essential that the structures around him be configured with the right purpose in

mind. Hodgson pays tribute to the forward thinking of the Swiss FA: 'Switzerland was far ahead of its time in 1992 when I joined. As with other countries, the football association there is the governing body, so it looks after all aspects of the sport from refereeing to handicapped sport, amateur football and so on. The difference is that in most countries, there is a large gap between what the FA is trying to do and what the professional leagues are trying to do. Whereas in Switzerland, they ensured there was board representation from league football, pure amateur football and the professional lower leagues from an early stage. This worked extremely well, because these four important people and I would get together regularly, and determine together how to get the most out of my role.' This may sound like a minor tweak, until we hear the effect of the body on the wider game: 'The classic example of how it worked well for me was the time they gave me with the players outside of the standard days around qualifying matches and friendlies. I would get the team for five or six get-togethers during a qualifying campaign. So when the players had played for their professional teams on a Sunday I would get them until the Wednesday morning, which gave us a couple of days together regularly during the season. That's a very good example of co-operation between all the bodies working in favour of the national team. The clubs were asked to commit to it, and they accepted that between three and five times a year we would have access to their players. Then thinking more along PR terms, we took the players that I had selected to different venues around Switzerland. That's easier in a small country, of course, but we wouldn't meet in Zurich or in Geneva all the time – we would go to Berne, Basle and other cities so that people in the various regions felt the national team was engaging with them. The arrangement worked really well, and I got to know players so much better. So often I had to make decisions based on one or two

sightings from a distance in the stand – do I want him or not want him? It fell down, of course, when some players built reputations and went to play in Germany and Italy – then I didn't get the same access. But overall it made an enormous difference.'

Hodgson's message is clear. Getting the governance structures right makes all the difference to the task of the manager. A leader cannot lead successfully and with authority without the right support and structures around him.

The Lifeblood

The Barclays Premier League is widely regarded as the most compelling football drama in the world. More than 35,000 people attend every one of the ten matches every week on average, with hundreds of millions more watching live coverage or highlights across the globe. It is estimated that 4.7 billion people watch Premier League football out of a global population of 7 billion. The true fans – those who pour enormous emotional energy into their chosen sides – will be gratified to hear the views of England's Roy Hodgson on them as the lifeblood of the game. He thinks of football supporters with great respect – almost affection: 'I've always worked on the basis of three very simple thoughts: that the fans know what they are looking for, that they understand what football is and that they want the best for their team. Then I add to that the simple fact that they keep our football going. It may not be their gate receipt money that keeps the current level of the game afloat – and they know that – but it is their presence. When you watch a Premier League game, you can't see an empty seat for love nor money. Then you watch a game in Serie A and you often see the empty seats everywhere, or you turn on to a League Cup game and there's hardly anybody there. Compare these and you

realise that it's fans who are the lifeblood of everything we do. The reason there are such powerful sponsorships of football – everything from cars to soft drinks – is because so many people want to watch it and so many people care passionately about it.' From this basic understanding, he operates on a simple principle: as with all things, he focuses on the people he's with. 'At a football match, I focus on the team. I should not be the point of attention for the fans – that should be the players. The fans are wise enough to understand that you need a coach or a manager to look after your team, but he's not the one you've come to watch on a Saturday afternoon. He might be the one you get interested in when he's talking about the team, talking about his players, talking about his philosophy and plans.'

Hodgson's thinking here is valuable. Every business, every organisation has stakeholders whose voices are important and influential. But one of the traps of leadership is to believe you are the centre of the universe. Hodgson has both humility and pragmatism, not disregarding the fans for their emotional attachment, but honouring it with respect and thoughtfulness. And he's right to do so. The emotional power of supporters to drive the business of a club is unusually strong.

This emotional power can put pressure on an organisation, and considerable personal pressure on a leader. Wenger cites it as the single greatest pressure he faces: 'The biggest pressure you have is to drive home on a Saturday night having lost a game and to think that some people will cry because you lost that game. That is the biggest pressure, to let people down. That's a big responsibility and I feel that the longer you stay at a club, unfortunately, the bigger the responsibility becomes.' Wenger is right: the deeper the relationship becomes between manager and fan, the more burdensome that can feel for the manager. There is, though, one special case

where this works for a manager, as André Villas-Boas explains: ‘At Porto, I had one massive, massive advantage, which Pep Guardiola also had at Barcelona: we were both coaching teams we supported as fans. When that happens, you know exactly how your fans behave, you know how to touch people, you know how to move people, you know the channels. It’s almost like every single word that comes out of your mouth touches people in a different way and moves your dressing room closer to what you want to achieve. The greatest managers are able to replicate these things at different clubs and in different leagues. José [Mourinho] is the greatest example of this kind of adaptability with maximum success. It is something that is not achievable for all other managers.’

For Warnock, supporters are both a pressure and an encouragement: ‘At all my recent clubs – Leeds, QPR, Crystal Palace, Sheffield United – people have said, “Well, I’ve got to say you weren’t my number one choice, but I’m glad you are here” and that’s nice. They have heard or read about this Neil Warnock who breathes fire and smoke comes out of his ears and they don’t want that – but when they actually get me working for them they understand how I work and they quite enjoy it. I think that’s what I love – making ordinary people happy and lifting expectations. One of the best moments in my life was going back to Palace with QPR. I had left them when they went into administration – and I thought I would get some real stick. But as I walked out of the tunnel the whole ground stood up to a man and woman and clapped. I will never, ever forget that. Even talking about it now is giving me goosebumps. And I just walked down the tunnel and I have never felt as emotional as that, and the Palace fans were fantastic, and it was one of the best moments ever.’ He also finds that supporters provide a very real reference point when the going gets tough: ‘I knew the QPR fans were totally behind me and it’s

been fantastic to get the emails. If we'd been relegated and finished rock bottom, the fans would have been fantastic and wanted me to carry on. But we wouldn't have got relegated, we would have finished mid-table and every one of those fans knew more about me and the football club than any of the new owners. That's why I knew that the fans were right.'

Tony Pulis began his second period at Stoke expecting no great support from the fans, but he turned it around. Now the fans are helping to define the club culture. 'When we got promoted in 2008 we were favourites to get relegated again. We used this to get the supporters on board with us. We said, "Listen, the whole country is against us, nobody gives us a chance – but we have got a chance if we stick together." The fans bought into that and they have remained very solid: we spent five consecutive seasons in the Barclays Premier League. We created history by being the only team in Stoke's 150-year existence to remain outside of the bottom six in top-flight football for five consecutive seasons. We featured in four major cup quarter-finals, an FA Cup semi-final and an FA Cup final. Furthermore we reached the latter stages of a major European cup competition only to lose out to Spanish giants Valencia. I guess there was a lot of psychology involved with me always beating the "us against the world" drum. The fans have been magnificent, that siege mentality is still there and long may it continue. That togetherness permeates the club. When you come to Stoke's training ground, from the people who clean the dressing rooms out, people who look after the kit, the canteen staff to the players, everybody is together.'

This direct communication between fans and manager is almost unique to the large-scale performance sports. But it does carry a fascinating challenge to leaders around how to influence large groups of stakeholders directly. In the British Airways strikes of 2009/10, the CEO Willy Walsh personally wrote email messages to all reward card

holders explaining the board's position and promising decisive action to end disruption. At the end of a season, Sir Alex has sometimes addressed the Old Trafford crowd through a vast speaker system. But perhaps the most delightful example in the pre-internet era of a manager communicating in this way came from Brian Clough at Nottingham Forest. He had noticed more bad language than ever coming from the home supporters. One day, arriving for a home game, the supporters were greeted by a hand-written sign: 'Gentlemen. No swearing, please. Brian.' The swearing is reputed to have stopped almost the same day. In the intense relationship between manager and fans, simple messages can have a massive impact.

Fans provide pressure, they provide encouragement, they are whom the managers do it for, they are the club's lifeblood. They are too many by far to speak with personally, and they can have a profound effect on a manager's career and on the fortunes of the club. In ancient Rome, the Caesars who feared the power of the people were the ones who kept themselves distant. Great leaders in football – and sometimes in business – use all the means at their disposal to engage with the wider audience, and they see it as a pleasure, not a chore.

The Voice

With only a few Clough-like exceptions, the voice through which football's leaders can engage their audience is the press and wider media. Unsurprisingly, Premier League football managers have a highly charged relationship with the media. Managers are as close to the action as it gets without (usually) playing themselves: they know things no one else knows (such as match tactics, players carrying injuries or the real state of team morale) and they are highly experienced and highly quotable. In short, if the manager is indeed the central authority at the club, then he is the one the

media will want to speak to. From the other direction, the media provides managers with the single most potent connection to the public. Through interviews and press conferences, they can express their reactions, their thinking and even their vision. Hodgson values them as the single most effective way of communicating with the club's fans: 'All press conferences – but especially televised ones – are very, very important.' The media needs the managers, and the managers need the media.

The challenge: intensity, intrusion, power and pressure

And the relationship is getting hotter and hotter. Where managers were interesting commentators 30 years ago, today they are central characters in the drama. Sir Alex is clear as to why this is: 'The media do this because today they are a beast that isn't interested any more in what happened in the 32nd minute of the match. If you go back in time, it was a chronicle of football. What you've got now is a dominant interest in reaction. It's all about how to sell a newspaper, and the manager is the focus of that because they know he is the one person that can be sacked. So there is a strong focus on the success or failure of a manager. It goes with the role as the most important member of the club.'

The media now have a direct impact on team dynamics. Kevin Keegan explains how it has changed since the 1970s at Liverpool: 'You might go to a player and have an argument – we had training sessions that could be quite feisty – but no one ever knew it outside the group. It was much easier to keep it in the group in those days. There was no Twitter or Facebook; the media was much easier to handle. I remember they used to travel with us from Scunthorpe on the bus! That changed incredibly, mainly because of the way the journalists were being pressured by their editors and other

people penning the headlines, I guess, to get stories at any cost. That led to a breakdown of trust between players and the press. Even if the stories weren't that bad, the headlines could be bad, and the players would be saying, "Don't give me that – it's your piece, you wrote it." We moved to a siege mentality of, "We don't want to talk to them, we don't want these people around us."

Allardyce is rueful at how the press can create a label for a manager, however undeserved. In his case, the label of employing negative tactics has created problems with fans, and even fuelled some discussion with peers: 'It's not actually about our style of football. It is a very unfortunate label that's attached to success. It started with fellow managers who were probably embarrassed by getting beaten by Bolton Wanderers. We knew we had a great team that could adapt to a different style ... and play to win football matches ... The unfortunate thing was that the press picked it up and because they said it, it had to be true. Mourinho didn't say it – he used that style to win the league! So we used to watch him and say he was playing like us. (They were better than us – we had good players, but they had *great* players.) It's a sad label that stuck. So now everywhere I go the first question they ask is always, "What style of football are you going to play?" It comes within about 30 seconds. So my answer is normally, "Do you ask every new manager that?" Many young managers are very aware of it now. They have understood that the last thing you want to do is get labelled. The only thing you can do about it is to create a label of your own.' As the banking sector (among others) will testify, shaking off a label or a reputation – whether personal or organisational – is a significant challenge for leadership.

Warnock is one of the most successful promotion managers of all time. He has a reputation for being tough, outspoken, unafraid to cross people – and with a hide like a rhinoceros. Only a part of

this is true. ‘My make-up is more complex than that. What the press say – it does hurt me, it hurts Sir Alex, it hurts all of us really. When I first started I wanted to ring up every paper that printed the wrong headline – pretend to be a source at the club. I had to realise, as I got older, that these guys have got stories to sell and I had to learn about people. I had to learn that this guy who is telling me he’ll never let me down will stitch me up the second my back is turned. It’s disappointing really and sad for the young managers nowadays that you can’t have the trust that I had in the press people when I first started ... I used to have our local journalists on the bus with me going to games. Well, you wouldn’t dream of that now. I remember in the last few months at QPR doing a press conference. There were six or seven there and this journalist said, “Could you just tell us, Neil – off the record – about so-and-so ... ” I just slowly took my breath and looked at everybody and said, “You are talking to me about off the record? Just look at every one of these f***** journalists here. Every one of them would stitch me up as soon as they look at me and you are saying off the record.” That’s how journalists are. They say “off the record”, but if I’d said anything they’d have slated me. They all laughed – we all had a laugh about it, which was good. You’ve got to make it light-hearted. But they all know that I know.’

Wilkinson admits he felt under pressure in front of the media – largely because he liked to think about answers before giving them. ‘When I was managing, my answers were never quick enough for the radio or the TV. The players would joke about how people would ask me a question and it would seem like there would be an eternity before I gave my answer. The press don’t give you time – and it’s under pressure when your weaknesses come to the surface.’

He also points to how much tougher it is now than 30 years ago. ‘What’s changed dramatically is the visibility. Everything now

is far greater and more immediate. In a strange way, I think sometimes it's less revealing for viewers and readers because managers have all learnt to play roles. So when the interview comes up, it's almost like you know what's coming. In fact, the media are happy when you do lose it! When I went to Italy with Ron Greenwood for the European Championships in 1980, there were about eight or ten staff and we went out to dinner with a load of journalists and TV people on three occasions. I would give the journalist an answer to the question, but then I'd say but I don't want you to use that and the reason is this and that. What they then wrote was a more important piece and in many ways the piece that was nearer to the truth and reality. Whereas now it's got to the point where clubs have media offices. The very, very good ones have got pretty much their own Alastair Campbell. It's a different world.

'Working with the media was like a dance where the judges are walking round the ballroom tapping you on the shoulder and getting rid of you. The reporters are the ones giving you the marks because they are representing public opinion most of the time. When I was chairing at Sheffield Wednesday, I would hear the local radio talking about public opinion. Then I would go to the media department and ask how many were on the blog in question – how many actual names. I remember one figure of 28. After I'd been chairman it was really weird walking round Sheffield – the number of people who came up and said, "We can't thank you enough for what you did." I felt like saying, "When all the s*** hits the fan, mightn't it have been a good idea if one of you had got the other 90 per cent that think like you and said to the others let them get on with it and shut up?" It's a shame the way press relations have gone. I think the good managers now exist in spite of the media – it's not part of their life any more. What Alex [Ferguson] did was use it, and I think Arsène is the same. The good ones use it rather than get abused by it.'

Cracking the code: acceptance, simplicity and keeping it all low key

At Arsenal, Arsène Wenger appears to have a stable and productive relationship with the media. So how does he do it? Most importantly, he acknowledges the job the media has to do and has a reputation for being dead straight in his dealings with them: 'This is because I am governed by two things. First, I have to accept their opinions. I respect that. I accept it if someone says I am a bad manager and I made the wrong decision here and there, as long as they keep only on the professional side. What I don't accept is when it goes into deeper [more personal] situations. Sometimes that can happen. Second, I think they do a job like I do – and they do a job that is not easy as well. In a competitive world they have to come out with articles that sell newspapers, and that becomes more and more difficult for them.'

Walter Smith had an excellent reputation as manager of Scotland for a low-key approach to the press. This was in direct response to the unusual, out-of-scale interest. 'In Scotland, the intensity of the media comes from being British. Being part of Britain, we have every national newspaper printing in Scotland. We have all the TV companies, we have the radio, we have everything there for a population of 5 million. So the intensity is out of proportion for a country of this size. I had to learn to handle that. I've always tried with the media to make sure that I never get too high or too low, especially in the Scotland job. I feel that that's important. It's sometimes a little boring for the media, and a bit boring for those who are looking in – but I always try to keep a middle line.'

Hodgson's approach to the press is typically positive and clear-cut: 'First, I don't get concerned about myself. I find that if I start to concern myself too much about how I am looking to the media, and how the general public is perceiving me, then I will be diluting

my real task: to coach and prepare the football team and to manage players. Always focus on the real task you've been given. But when the time does come to speak to the media, then I need to devote my full attention to them and to represent my organisation – club or national federation – in the right way. Finally, I take the opportunity of a press conference to speak to the supporters as the important people they are. I assume they have the same feelings about football and the same love and passion that I have myself. So the press conference is my forum, not the actual arena itself.

Interestingly, managers find that media attitudes vary from country to country – which accounts for some of the variety in approach from non-native Premier League managers. Carlo Ancelotti actually prefers the English press to the more tactically aware Italians and French: 'I never had a problem with the press; usually I like to joke with the press. Sometimes we all take it too seriously. Football is a game, after all. I love the atmosphere in England for this reason. In England, football is very important, but the atmosphere is very good. The press in England are not so interested in tactics, so they don't put so much pressure on managers. They like the private lives – especially the tabloids. In Italy and here in France they put more pressure on the tactics of the game. In Italy they want all the press conference to talk about the line-up. All the questions are to understand what the manager thinks about the line-up and which players are going to play or not. If they understand the line-up they can also understand the player that plays and maybe they can put some pressure on the players that don't play. In France they are the same. So in the press conference, I like to joke and keep it light.'

And, of course, there's always the language issue. Interviewers may push less hard on managers speaking in a second or third language, but as Hodgson has realised from his many years outside

Britain, it is down to the manager to have enough of the language to maximise his opportunity for public impact. ‘While you can get around language barriers on the coaching field where a lot of what you do is technical, dealing with other stakeholders – not least the media – can present a major problem. You have to develop at least a working knowledge of the language when working abroad.’

Football’s leaders generally have, it seems, genuine respect and appreciation for the press and media – although the divergent interests of the two camps will almost inevitably lead to pain in the relationship at times. Intention seems to be the key. Leaders who look forward to meeting the press as an opportunity to share their insights with the public, who respect the work they are engaged to do, and who approach the interactions with positive intent will generally come off well.

The Leader at the Centre

In the maelstrom that is top-flight football, the most successful leaders are intentional in their dealings with their stakeholders. They know how to approach them, and they spend time getting it right. Five mindsets and skills emerge as valuable.

1. Relish your role at the centre:
It is tough being the man in the middle, but it also brings great privilege. It represents a great challenge, and great leaders relish great challenge.
2. Get your priorities right:
Best practice seems to be first to ensure the relationship with the owner-chairman is in good state, then devote focus and energy to the team. In other words, understand your key stakeholder then do the job you’re paid to do to the best of your ability.

3. Establish and communicate a shared vision:
The relationship with the owner-chairman tends to flourish where there is a shared vision. Once that is established, the manager needs to convey the vision to his people – and so the owner needs to be sure to appoint a good communicator to the role.
4. Accept readily that other parties are involved:
Far from resenting the involvement of genuine stakeholders, the top managers welcome it. They realise that owners, governing bodies, supporters and the media not only have a right to be there, but also have an important role to play. This mindset drives strong relationships. They *intend* good for the other party – be it a great performance for the fans, a return on investment for the owner or even a good story for the press.
5. Focus on each relationship in turn:
From that intention comes an ability to focus on the relationship in question, to take real time to connect with the people in front of them. It takes real leadership to do it and is not always easy. But the leader who can suspend the natural frustrations and come to every interaction with genuinely good intent will find himself with the strongest, most supportive relationships on every level.

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The Manager asks key questions in detailed conversations with some of the most successful managers in recent football history, examining the crucial issues that they have encountered during their high-profile careers. It will change the way you look at both football and business.



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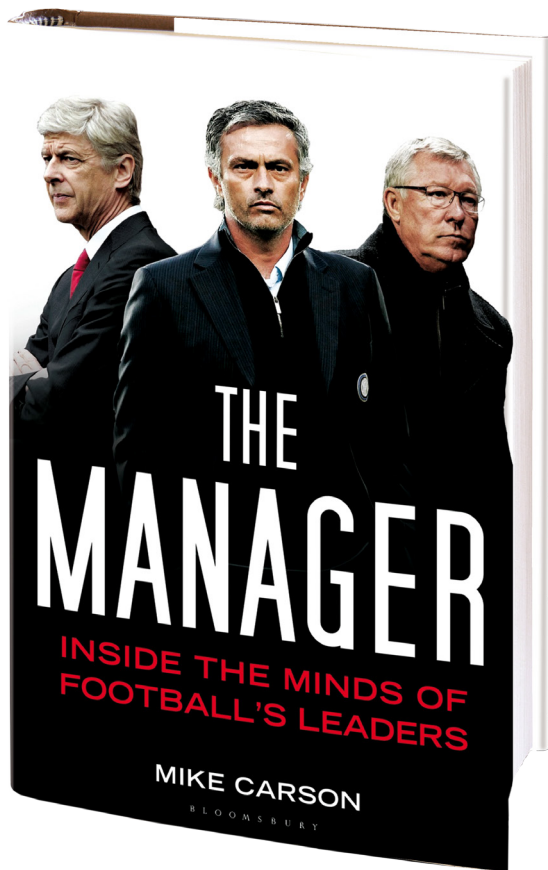
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