

Let me begin by adding something to the title:  
**Teamwork and Leadership – it’s all about the planning and the execution!**

**At the Adelaide Clipsal 500**

I spent a weekend recently at the Clipsal 500 V8 Supercars motor race in Adelaide (South Australia). The Clipsal is Australia’s largest domestic motorsport event, and runs over four days (Thu-Sun). Total attendance this year was around 280,000, with about 80,000 spectators on both Saturday and Sunday.

While I confess to being a “petrol-head”, I also take a particular interest in the teamwork, leadership, and planning that is evident throughout the event. Here are some quick takeouts:

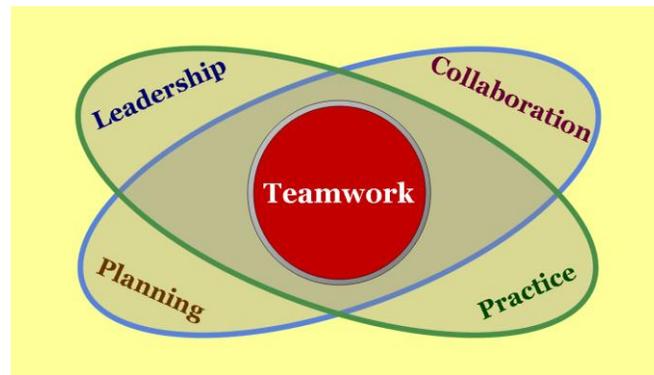
- in the main race for the V8 Supercars, the defending champion came home in third place after suffering from two poor strategy decisions by his team
- the new Clipsal 500 champion, who started from 15<sup>th</sup> on the grid (in a 25-car field), won because of an inspired strategy decision on the part of his team
- the 2013 V8 Supercars series champion, while leading during the main race, suffered from a lapse in teamwork by his crew, costing him the chance of a win
- throughout the four days, all events, including support races and exhibitions, plus numerous other entertainment activities, went ahead like clockwork, right on schedule
- each of the four days was concluded with an open-air concert, featuring multiple bands/artists – the Sunday night concert included local boy Guy Sebastian, and Country Music legend, Keith Urban
- parts of the race track are set on inner-city streets, which must be prepared with safety barriers,

fencing, spectator stands, etc. – as I left the Keith Urban concert at about 11:30 pm, the clean-up crews were busily working on restoring the streets to normal

**Keith Urban and teamwork**

Over the weekend, everywhere that I looked I could see the evidence of teamwork. While success in the on-track events relied heavily on the highest quality of teamwork [i.e. excellence – See: [Teamwork – it’s about excellence](#)], the most interesting example for me was actually the teamwork displayed during Keith Urban’s concert.

For over 2½ hours, in front of an audience of around 20,000, Urban and his Band gave a totally polished performance. Band members, including Urban, regularly had their instruments swapped by Crew members between and during items. Band members were also constantly moving around the stage – everyone seemed totally ‘in synch’ with one-another.



Teamwork: Leadership, Planning, Collaboration, Practice

Urban even spent a good part of the concert on a small second stage in the middle of the crowd, giving some of his fans a real ‘close-up’ opportunity (He did this twice – working his way through the crowd, while continuing to sing the whole time.). The

teamwork and coordination was first class – everyone in the whole crew clearly knew what to do, and also how and when to do it.

While I have no doubt that Urban and his crew have a routine for their concerts, this was a ‘on-off’ ‘down under’ performance, executed to the highest standard. Their polished teamwork was as slick as that from any of the pit crews during the V8 Supercar racing.

**Teamwork needs leadership**

In my experience, the basis of teamwork is: leadership, planning, collaboration, and practice. Whether it is in sports, business, or voluntary organizations, teamwork is about people working collaboratively to achieve a particular result. Invariably, behind the collaboration of team members, there will be some leadership, providing guidance and direction (sometimes called ‘vision’).

Leadership may be vested in one person, or even in a group (i.e. ‘leadership team’). While there are a number of popular leadership models and styles, the essential requirement of leadership is one very simple thing – followers. Without followers (or ‘supporters’), a person cannot be considered to be a leader [See: [Effective leadership - where do good leaders come from?](#)].

**Leadership means planning**

Irrespective of which leadership model or style they may use, an effective leader needs to give their followers/supporters a sense of direction and purpose (i.e. to achieve an intended result). The leader also needs to have a plan for how the efforts of their followers/supporters will be converted into the intended result.

Leaders may develop their plans by themselves, or they may involve some of their followers/supporters

in the planning. Either way, the plan should be a roadmap of: what to do; who will do it; where, when, and how to do it; and also how much ‘cost’ will be involved in doing it (time, people, \$, etc.). In short, a leader without a plan is like an explorer without a map!

However, there are huge gaps between having a sense of direction/purpose (vision), developing a plan, and actually achieving the intended result. Effective leaders must be able to communicate both their visions and their plans. They must also execute their plans; unless the plan is executed, everything else is wasted effort – “*vision without execution is hallucination*” (anon).

At the Adelaide Clipsal 500, in addition to teamwork, I saw ample evidence of planning and execution. What was not so much in evidence was leadership – that is not to say there was no leadership. Rather, I was seeing teams that were functioning like well-oiled machines. The leaders had already played their part, putting in place their visions and plans, and people were now executing those plans with a minimum of fuss and bother.

**Planning 101 – the basics**

To paraphrase Wikipedia, a plan is “*a diagram or list of actions, with timings and resources, used to achieve a goal.*” The first step in developing a plan is to decide what must be achieved – this is the goal (or - aim, objective, intention, mission, purpose, desired result, etc.). Once we have that resolved, we can work out the actions or tasks necessary, estimate likely timings, and allocate our resources.

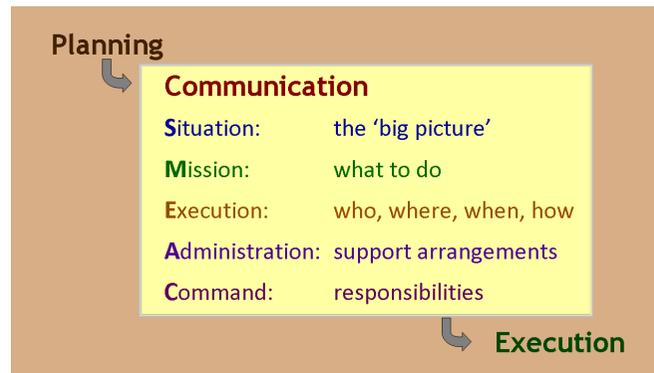
Planning is basically about “thinking ahead”. It is something that we all do to some extent, even at a personal level (e.g. what are you going to be doing this coming weekend?). Leaders must plan on at least three different fronts:

- for the work that their team is responsible for

- for the development of their team members
- for their own personal development

In most situations, our ability to plan successfully improves as we gain experience. This particularly applies to things like working out the various actions or tasks that we must include in the plan, and also to estimating how much time is needed to complete any particular action or task.

We must also remember that our plan is unlikely to be perfect – there can be unforeseen events that interrupt our execution, causing us to revise our plan. While we may make an allowance for this by including a contingency factor, it is advisable to also maintain a flexible approach and attitude towards the plan.



Communication is the real key to successful execution

**Execution needs communication**

Once we have developed our plan, the next thing we need to do is to communicate it to those who will be involved in it’s execution. One of the most effective formats that I have ever seen for doing this is the military model for giving orders (i.e. ‘instructions’ or ‘directions’). This uses five sections – **Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration & Logistics, Command & Signal** (known as SMEAC). Here is an adaptation:

- **situation:** a brief description of ‘the big picture’, including ‘why’ we are doing something
- **mission:** a clear and concise statement of what must be achieved
- **execution:** the nuts and bolts of what has to be done (who, where, when, how)
- **administration:** support arrangements, e.g. equipment, supplies
- **command:** assignment of responsibilities, reporting requirements

The beauty of this format is twofold: *firstly*, it becomes a form of checklist, ensuring that important information is not overlooked; *secondly*, it is a consistent approach that everyone uses. That said, there is no reason why we cannot ‘customise’ the format to suit our own needs, e.g. we may want to find alternate terminology to replace the military flavour.

In my experience, the real key to execution is *not* the vision, *nor* is it the planning, but *it is* the communication. A poorly communicated vision will not attract interest or support. Likewise, a poorly communicated plan will not be well understood, leading to poor execution. Part of the communication challenge is about marketing, and part is about explanation [See: [Explanation – a key to learning](#)].

**Worth a look**

[Leadership and Teamwork](#) [3min:10sec] Feb 2010: Major Lynn Wray tells the story of the teamwork behind developing someone as a leader

**Coming next:**

Why job interviews are a two-way street

And here are some of my [memories of teamwork, leadership, planning, and execution from the 2014 Clipsal 500](#).