

From Slump to Star



By Janki DePalma,
CPSM, LEED AP

Creating the Environment to Make Your Team Shine





Over the years, my teen son and I have found connection by discussing sports—especially my hometown team, the Golden State Warriors.

My mind loves to think in analogies, and I couldn't help but find the connection between winning projects in the architecture, engineering, construction industry, and the world of basketball. During the 2022 NBA Division playoffs, my son and I focused on one player in particular on the Warriors roster, Andrew Wiggins. Wiggins garnered a negative reputation for being lazy and overhyped on past teams. However, he seems to have found his groove with the Warriors, and in June 2022, he

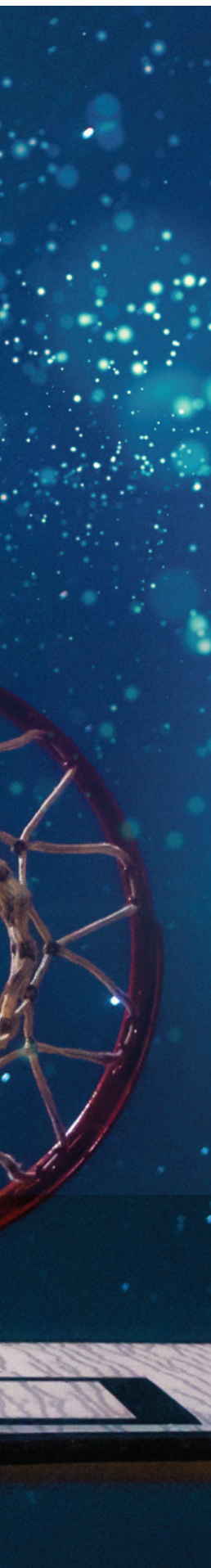


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helped his team clinch the championship title in game six against the Boston Celtics.

As a follow-up to my February 2019 *Marketer* article "Teamwork is Everything in Business Development and Basketball," I wanted to explore how the team environment—coach, fellow players, and fans—affects a player. Like Wiggins developed with his new team, can marketing & business development professionals create an environment that can help their technical staff improve? While I always have theories, I reached out to some experts for their opinions. Two of my business development heroes are Elaine Moal, Director of Marketing and Business Development at Altura Associates in San Francisco, and Iben Falconer, Global Marketing and Business Development Leader of SOM. I had them share their thoughts on how they help build their team, and we dove into my analogy. While no single environment works for everyone, here are some ideas that all of us should explore.

Surround yourself with inspiration. Wiggins publicly attributes his career improvement to the inspiration provided by his all-star teammates such as Steph Curry and Klay Thompson. Inspiration gives us a living example of what is attainable. For Wiggins, having league record-setters sharing the court lets him see how he can push himself. For the AEC industry, demystifying the winning process can provide similar inspiration. How a company wins work should not be a mystery. Elaine said she pushes her team to "elevate our best." This process includes explicitly sharing the small elements that occurred for the win and highlighting all the people involved- not just the one making the figurative basket. Regularly sharing these details gives confidence to all team members on how their contribution matters. Iben agrees, citing that constant education was like the post-game commentary by ESPN.



Learn from the best. The Warriors created a workplace where Wiggins could shine. Surrounded by impressive players, he pushed himself to stay coachable. Staying coachable creates a mindset of learning and neuroplasticity. Iben shared an exercise she uses with her team. She identified essential business functions such as networking, contract negotiations, client management, and having each team member self-identify their strengths. Then, as a team, they share their thoughts on scenarios to gain insight. While each person still had their strengths, they started to learn the mindset of the other members who had other strengths. Soon people begin to think, "What Would Jennifer or Steve Do?" in this situation and act from there. Additionally, symbiotic pairings would follow - like a buddy system. As a group, they learned best practices and identified the experts.

Block the negative talk. Podcasts and pundits had choice words to say about Wiggins's abilities and motivation. While none of our team members faces scrutiny after every networking event, individuals are often their worst critics. We may tell ourselves that we are "not good at networking" or "just not cut out" in one area of the business. Shutting off those voices requires discipline. Elaine encourages her architects at networking events with a "pre-game" pep talk. Like a good coach, Elaine helps her team focus on what matters and blocks out the noise. She will give them specific goals, such as talking to three people or giving them a targeted attendee to meet.

Iben also reminded me that the last thing anyone ever needs is to hear "you should be more [extroverted/loud/bold]." Instead, work with the strengths of your team. For example, Iben recounted a story of working with a very talented, introverted designer. Rather than have him attend crowded networking events, Iben recommended curated tours of the office where the designer could share stories. It was an experience that lent authenticity and gave him confidence by letting him be his best self.

Build consistency. A winning team requires players who can reliably produce results. Consistency with basketball comes from solid plays, practice, and trust in your team. We rely on the same elements in our industry. As marketing and business development professionals, we can create systems that lead to consistency, such as finding ongoing networking opportunities. Creating the muscle memory of entering info in our CRM and building a culture of trust where all your team leads share information is the consistency your team requires to succeed.

Many people are anxious about networking events, feeling a pressure to return with a stack of business cards from new contacts. Elaine introduced me to the "Rule of 250" that when applied consistently, has fantastic results. Attributed to car salesman extraordinaire Joe Girard, author of *How to Sell Anything to Anybody*, the Rule of 250 states that each relationship you make has the potential to influence 250 others. In Joe's world one auto

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can help you identify patterns of behavior and decide if these are still helpful. For example, are you motivated to be the best especially in comparison to others? Being a high achiever as a child may have brought you positive attention from your family and helped you climb the corporate ladder. Self-awareness helps you see that perhaps the motivator to "be the best" is also holding you back from learning a new skill. Does your identity as the "rock-star" subconsciously steer you away from challenges? Nurturing self-awareness is difficult because it forces you to look at deeply ingrained beliefs.

I love looking at business through the lens of team sports because the days of the solo rainmaker are over. People working towards a common goal and maximizing their strengths is what wins championships (and clients). As marketing and business development professionals, we must find a way to use our team to their best ability. We can be the ones that create that environment where our players thrive. Just as Steph Curry and Steve Kerr helped Andrew Wiggins move closer to his full potential, we can help our team see themselves as stars. Not everyone needs to make the winning shots, but everyone needs to learn how to work together and make plays that matter. My son and I will watch anxiously when the NBA season starts this fall to see if the thriving environment at Golden State can keep producing the magic. ■



JANKI DEPALMA, CPSM, LEED AP, (she/her) is senior associate, director of business development for Kirksey Architecture - Austin. Contact her at 512.640.1083 or jankid@kirksey.com.

customer included 250 potential ones. Using this concept, Elaine coaches her team to focus on making one or two relevant contacts at an event versus aiming for an unrealistically high number. Consistently focusing on just one or two contacts pays off when you factor in this exponential power.

Stay curious. One of my very favorite "Ted Lasso" moments is during a dart contest when Ted quotes Walt Whitman and reminds us to "stay curious." Being curious leads to empathy, you begin understanding someone else's viewpoint when you ask questions. Elaine reminded me that sometimes the most straightforward thing she can do is ask her teammates to "tell me more." If someone says they "can't network," be curious instead of firing back with solutions. What is making someone anxious? Keep asking questions, and you may find that the solutions reveal themselves.

Developing self-awareness. The foundation of emotional intelligence starts with self-awareness. Namely asking the questions: what motivates me? Why do I do the things I do? How does the way I act and react affect others? This often-overlooked component