



## Am I Good Enough?

By Hal Johnson

Interesting question, right? Actually, it's probably the most asked question by top performers. Further, it's a question a lot more managers should be asking themselves. It's the kind of attitude that works well in any competitive environment – sports, business or the game of life itself. The heart of the issue is really not *am I good enough*, but *have I done all I can do to be as good as I can be?*

We have just come through some of the toughest economic times most of us have ever experienced. And we know we are not all the way through them yet. Many of my business colleagues are still trying to decide what strategic approach to apply to 2011. So, I am offering up here some thoughts on one very strategic move for 2011 – *keep getting better*.

There are some stimulating thoughts to consider for our strategic thinking along this line that appear in an article in the current Harvard Business Review – “*Are you a Good Boss or a Great One?*” The authors point out that most managers stop working on themselves at some point in their career. They seldom ask themselves, “How good am I?” or “What do I need to do better?” unless they are shocked into it. When did you last ask those questions? It seems it does not occur to most managers to ask that question. I strongly urge my colleagues to take charge of this incredibly important responsibility and don't wait for the shock stimulus – take the initiative.

Recently I was leading a workshop that included a discussion on *forced ranking*, a concept made popular by Jack Welch while he was at GE. The process involves ranking a group of employees into performance levels graded A, B or C. The concept carries with it the idea that we should be helping the B's and C's move up a performance grade and expand the opportunities for the A's. In other words, *keep getting better*. Where I have seen the concept in practice – in business literature or in live business settings, I observe it is the direct reflection of the

commitment of the organization's leadership.

The concept of *always getting better* ought to be on the leadership team agenda pretty regularly – I suggest monthly. Why? Because unless the leaders of the business keep emphasizing it – and doing it – it is so easy to get lulled into a malaise of false comfort.

I cannot help but think of Coach John Wooden (UCLA basketball) when thinking about *always getting better*. It was one of the main elements of his coaching philosophy. Not surprising, most of his wisdom on the basketball court applies to everyday living. Here is one of his many maxims that not only resonates with always getting better but reinforces some of the most effective leadership thinking: *Success comes from knowing that you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming*. That is one of the most critical ingredients for continued success on or off the court. Wooden coached his teams to be prepared and to focus on their performance capabilities. Then they would be prepared to face their opponents, regardless.

So, regardless of what the economy brings our way this year, I would argue our best strategy is to keep getting better. Here's a closing John Wooden thought to support *always getting better*. Coach Wooden did not focus on winning. He focused on preparation. He taught that if his teams were better prepared than their competition, the right outcomes would be there. It's tough to argue with ten national championships and 40 winning seasons.

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