

## The Mentor Leader: Secrets to Building People and Teams That Win Consistently

By: Tony Dungy Tyndale House Publishers 2010

**Good news-** Easy to read, and unlike many books on leadership, particularly the business books I usually do my BVC Opinions on, this biographical account comes across sincerely, warmly, and compellingly. Coach Tony Dungy's focus on people is exemplified in his writing style. It is encouraging rather than demeaning, and is very inspirational.

**Bad news-** Yes, it is another one of those coach books on coaching, or in this case, mentoring. And this one has too many ideas and concepts!

**Good news-** It has action steps at the end of each chapter and really does have some very practical lessons for companies, organizations, departments and leaders of today and tomorrow that I have summarized and turned into real tactics! And as usual, I hope you can put them to use right away.

### Summary:

Tony Dungy spent six seasons with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers before taking a position as head coach of the Indianapolis Colts. In his seven seasons with the Colts, he led them to a total of 85 regular season wins (which is a lot) and one Super Bowl Championship. But beyond that, Coach Dungy created in Indiana a legacy of excellence, integrity, and character that has come to define the Colts organization. Three of his former assistants have gone on to establish their own successful head coaching positions: Lovie Smith of the Bears, Mike Tomlin of the Steelers, and Jim Caldwell of the Colts. So, what's the point? Coach Dungy has established himself as the very definition of leader, and when he writes a book on becoming the Mentor Leader, I think what he has to offer will probably work.

*"Your only job is to help your players be better."* That single idea had a huge impact on Tony Dungy when he heard it from one of his earliest mentors, and it led him to develop the successful leadership style so admired by players and coaches throughout the NFL. Now, an excellent career and a Super Bowl victory later, Tony Dungy reveals what propelled him to the top of his profession and shows how we can apply the same approach to virtually any area of our lives. In the process, he offers his keys of mentoring leadership and why they're so effective; why mentor leadership brings out the best in people, how a mentor leader recovers from mistakes and handles team discipline, and the secret to getting people to follow you and do their best for you without intimidation tactics. As a son, a football player, and a winning coach, Tony has always learned from others on his path to success. In this book, he offers his best ideas to help us become better mentor leaders. He believes that the focus of a great leader should be not on outcomes, but rather on the good of those being led. His purpose is clear; people first, and then objectives. Dungy makes a clear distinction between a position of leadership and a person of leadership. Even without a formal leadership title, people can still make a difference as they influence those around them. Additionally, Dungy doesn't believe leadership is something a person is born with, but rather a trait to be developed.

As you might expect, many of the stories and the context in which leadership traits are conveyed are couched in football. Dungy is, after all, a football coach. He offers a truly unique perspective as a Super Bowl winning football coach and a man who has benefited much from mentoring and who has intentionally sought for years to have a positive influence on the lives of those he touches.

### The book has a catchy chapter titles with nine "M" words heading them up:

Chapter 1 The **Mandate** of a Mentor Leader  
Chapter 2 The **Mind-Set** of a Mentor Leader  
Chapter 3 The **Maturity** of a Mentor Leader  
Chapter 4 The **Marks** of a Mentor Leader  
Chapter 5 The **Moments** of a Mentor Leader  
Chapter 6 The **Model** of a Mentor Leader  
Chapter 7 The **Means** of a Mentor Leader  
Chapter 8 The **Methods** of a Mentor Leader  
Chapter 9 The **Measure** of a Mentor Leader

And each chapter is loaded with stories and five to ten action points. I will summarize Tony's 75 suggested action points in my Applications section later.

If you're a fan of leadership books like me (or at least if you like these BVC Opinions on them), you'll recognize ideas and quotes by leadership experts such as Ken Blanchard on flexing your leadership style from Situational Leadership, Steven Covey on starting with the end in mind and first things first from The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People, Jim Collins on Tony Dungy epitomizing the traits of a top level leader from Good to Great, and others. If not, that's ok too. It's still a good read.

Some of the topics or concepts that I thought were particularly interesting were focusing on strengths (as I discussed in my last BVC Opinion), the pre-eminence of character and integrity in the life of a leader, building a team whose strengths complement yours and each others, the importance of just hanging out and being present in the lives of those you hope to influence, the need to create a culture to effect change, and the idea of treating those you lead as volunteers who really want to participate and win. These are not new ideas, but Dungy does a great job of modeling and explaining them in a very practical way.

Dungy begins by giving the **mandate** of a mentor leader and reminds us to focus on significance. He urges us to value those we lead and keep an eternal perspective in mind. He continues with the mentor's **mindset**, which should be that the mentor is there to serve and not be served. A chapter on the **maturity** of the mentor leader discusses dealing with the past and forgiving yourself. After this Dungy urges us to find the **characteristics** (or **marks**) that matter: character, competence, integrity, self-assuredness, keeping the mission and vision out in front, approachability, willingness to change, loyalty, accountability and authenticity.

The second half of the book turns to more practical aspects on being a mentor leader such as influencing at opportune moments, living the **message** of a mentor leader, and using every opportunity to serve as a role model. He gives us the **means** to cultivate a team culture in which individuals are made stronger by being a part of the team. He closes out with **methods** to enhance the potential of those we lead: Engage, Educate, Equip, Encourage, Empower, Energize, and Elevate, and calling us all to look beyond just the present win/loss column.

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At the end of the book, he acknowledges that a lot has been covered, and that the task of being a mentor leader might be a daunting one. But he also says the true **measure** of a mentor leader is how well we build others into mentors who live lives of impact. So he encourages us with this advice: *“Don’t worry about remembering (everything). Think instead about beginning to live what we’ve talked about - each and every day, in every setting of your life. And let me encourage you to start right where you are, with the people right around you, doing something as simple as engaging with them and talking. Sometimes the smallest things we do have the biggest impact. (So) **Just start.**”*

### Applications:

I have chosen and/or summarized a few of Tony’s zillion action items or steps that might help us become better mentor leaders. From:

- Chapter 1 (The Mandate of a Mentor Leader)
  - Self-assess your mentoring integrity, impact, perspective and goals
  - Identify one person you can begin to mentor right now
- Chapter 2 (The Mind-Set of a Mentor Leader)
  - Self-assess your focus and influence relative to mentoring
  - Look ahead with a clear mentoring vision AND focus on today
- Chapter 3 (The Maturity of a Mentor Leader)
  - Come to grips with your past, forgive yourself and be authentic
- Chapter 4 (The Marks of a Mentor Leader)
  - Assess yourself against these traits of a mentor leader: character, competence, integrity, self-assuredness, keeping the mission and vision out in front, approachability, willingness to change, loyalty, accountability and authenticity
- Chapter 5 (The Moments of a Mentor Leader)
  - Look back at mentors and role models you had and learn from them, and if you can, thank them
- Chapter 6 (The Model of a Mentor Leader)
  - Consider your legacy and if you don’t like it, work to change it
- Chapter 7 (The Means of a Mentor Leader)
  - Practice all that leadership stuff you have learned over the years
- Chapter 8 (The Methods of a Mentor Leader)
  - Ask yourself Tony’s ultimate question. *Are you adding value to the lives of others?*
- And from Chapter 9 (The Measure of a Mentor Leader)
  - Just start!!

### And Finally:

I work with many clients on **Coaching, Mentoring, Personal and Leadership Development** and hope to put aspects of Tony Dungy’s book to use with them. If you want more thoughts about this book, or want to add your own, check out my **blog**. You can visit it at <http://richsteel.blogspot.com/> This opinion and others are posted on my newly revised web site: [www.rs-bvc.com](http://www.rs-bvc.com) To talk more about this and other topics, **e-mail me** (Rich Steel) at [rsbvc@aol.com](mailto:rsbvc@aol.com) or **call me** at my office on 610 388 3680 or on my cell at 610 324 8466.

### About Brandywine Valley Consulting

#### Who We Are

We are a high quality organization development and training company that **makes a difference** for its customers.

#### What We Do

Our experience and network enables us to **deliver** superior value to our clients through:

- Consulting Solutions
- Training Solutions
- Executive Coaching (and Mentor Leadership!)

#### How We Are Different

We value our relationships and **truly customize** what we do to meet the needs of our clients.