

**Group Case: Investigating Leadership**

**Coach Herman Boone**

**April 13, 2005**

Shonda Brown  
Sarah Cahill  
Greg Hensley  
Nicole Offutt  
Jenny Starr

## **The Great Event**

Sometimes leaders are called to the forefront to create changes because of the situations that are around them. Martin Luther King Jr. came to the aid of the African American people during the civil rights movement. Gandhi came to the aid of his people during a time of great religious repression. We were introduced early in our semester to this scenario called, “The Great Event.” King and Gandhi still would have been great leaders but if the events around them had been different they may not have made such a significant impact with their leadership. This is the type of scenario that sets our leader, Herman Boone, apart from every other high school football coach. This is why his story inspired Disney to make a movie based on his leadership and the story of the 1971 Titans called, “Remember the Titans.”

Instead of just one event, there were a couple of events that helped separate Herman Boone from his constituents. The first great event was the May 1954 decision of Brown vs. Board of Education that concluded separate but equal was unconstitutional. This decision paved a path to the desegregation of schools and public works (Brown versus). This decision was also the cause of many years of extreme racial tension that still existed in 1971, seventeen years after the landmark decision, when our leader’s great event takes place. The second event was that, in Alexandria, Virginia the school board had made a decision to limit the number of schools available to students and combined some of the existing high schools into one school. This caused tension in the community since it combined schools that were predominantly African American with schools that were predominantly White. It was forced integration at its extremist form. In one

interview that we conducted with a player on the 1971 Titans team, Jim Brown describes the situation at the time,

“...There were some tense moments at a few school board meetings over the new “K-6-2-2-2” plan for dividing up where the kids went to school, “K”indergarten, 6 primary years, 2 middle schools, 2 junior high and 2 senior high. This meant that all the juniors and seniors of the three schools in Alexandria (FC Hammond, George Washington, and TC Williams) now had to go to one school, TCW. This is the real story behind the movie. No one wanted to change schools and go to a school with ‘them’. ‘They’ were different; ‘they’ were not like ‘us’. No one wanted ‘them’ around.”

The third and final event was the replacement of a popular white head coach, Bill Yoast, with an African American coach, Herman Boone. All of these events set the stage for Coach Herman Boone’s story.

### **Modeling the Way**

In the book, *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner state that, “To be a leader, you have to Model the Way for others by demonstrating intense commitment to your beliefs with each and every action” (83). Coach Boone demonstrated this commitment everyday. One of Boone’s players, Tom Lewis, stated that, “No matter if you liked him or not, you respected him. No one worked harder, longer, or fought as hard for us as Herman. How can you not respond to that level of commitment and devotion to you and your friends?” Boone’s demonstration of commitment and respect for his players instilled reciprocity from the team. The dedication and respect he had for the Titans was what he expected from the players. Boone did not expect anything from his team that he would not give to them himself. He also expected these traits to be

prevalent amongst the team as a whole. The racial tensions between the players were not highlighted. The team understood that it would simply not be tolerated. The result of this ultimatum was constant respect from all angles of those involved in the T.C.

Williams football team.

Herman Boone's vision for his players did not stop at the end of the season. His determination to give players the opportunity to exceed both on and off the field inspired the team to follow his direction. As player Lee Davis stated, "Everyone on the first and second string offense and defense were able to get scholarships and he made ways for all the others who wanted to attend college (to be able to do so)." "Looking back you can see his plan now as he sent many to the same schools as he worked with college recruiters to take blue chip players where he would throw in a few average players along in the deal" (Davis). Another player, Fred Alderson, told us that Coach Boone came from rural North Carolina where students were severely limited in comparison with T.C. Williams's students. He wanted to be sure that everyone who had the desire to be successful were able to use the opportunities available to accomplish their own personal goals. Coach Boone's personal values of dedication, respect, and constant drive to be more successful were clear to the players. These values were expressed daily and brought about the desired result of a successful season. Boone helped to ensure bright futures for those who might not have had the same opportunities without his support. Boone's voice was expressed through his actions to support and push the players to achieve their personal bests both on and off the field. In return he expected, and received, total dedication from his players.

### **Enabling Others to Act**

Another practice of leadership that Boone exemplifies is enabling others to act. He does this in two ways: fostering collaboration and strengthening others (Kouzes 241). Boone was seen as a dictator that wanted things to go “his way or the highway” (Alderson). He also knew that, as a coach, he could not do everything on his own. Therefore, he had to enable others and get the very best out of them to reach the goal of success.

As a coach of team sports Boone ensured that every player and every coach contributed to the success of the team. There is not one person that can account for 100% of the success. Boone created an environment of collaboration. He did this by creating trust amongst the team members and coaches. Despite the racial tensions, Boone was able to get the Titans to trust each other by sending them to camp and working them until they could not move anymore. Player Lee Davis stated that the team was “so tired after practice all you wanted to do is rest” and did not care about the racial issues surrounding the team. They just wanted to play football and win together. He also created trust by treating all players equally. “He was tough, fair from the standpoint that no one was above praise or wrath. You were late- run a mile. 3<sup>rd</sup> team, captain, black, white, star or bench warmer it made no difference” (Alderson). By treating all his players fairly, the players could trust Boone and knew that he would not give any special treatment. Everyone got what they worked for.

Boone also fostered collaboration by rewarding joint efforts. Combining three high school football teams was a daunting task. Because of this, when the guys worked

well together they had to know it. Even though Boone was a real “hard ass” (Lewis) he gave praise when it was deserved. “If you did well you were praised...” (Alderson).

Boone enabled others to act by strengthening them. One way is by giving power to get power (Kouzes 286). Boone definitely set himself up to be seen as the “boss” but he knew he had to teach his players to be leaders themselves. Boone led his players in a manner that would allow the players to be leaders both on and off the field. “We learned what it meant to be an involved team member as well as a leader. Coach Boone taught us how to succeed. That lesson made the vast majority of us successful individuals who knew how to be a team player and a leader” (Lewis). Boone also had to give power to his assistant coaches. The coaches all had different roles, all of which were important to the success of the team. “Boone was the strict disciplinarian and Yoast was the good guy” (Lewis). Coach Hines was able to show his sense of humor. Because Boone worked well with the other coaches and gave them power, the team had the ability to succeed.

Confidence and competence are also important ways to strengthen others. Boone did so by finding a way to give every player time on the field. If you did not start, there was a place for you on special teams. Former Titan Tom Lewis mentioned this trait. “I don’t think many teams can say as much about their coaches’ determination to put everyone on the field.” That is an important quality of a leader; one that can make every team member feel like they have an important role on the team and that they are needed. Even though Boone was a tyrant at times, he had a team of 87 guys that would not quit because he had confidence in them.

Yet another way to strengthen others is through fostering accountability (Kouzes 299). Boone was very strict and made sure everyone was giving their all. He made sure

the players went to class so they would be eligible to play, and he made them run extra if they were late to practice (Lewis). Boone did not let anybody get away with anything. It was through these traits that Boone used his leadership to enable others to act.

### **Challenging the Process**

Herman Boone was a great coach, but great high school coaches can be found all over the country. What made Boone an exemplary coach can be attributed to the times, social structure, and the approach he used to turn those players into a team. T.C. Williams was a new team, a blended team, and with it came old rivalries, racial tension, and over twice as many players than most teams had.

Kouzes and Posner state that challenging the process involves searching for opportunities, experimenting, and taking risks (173). It is safe to say that Herman Boone's first step of accepting the job at T.C. Williams was a risk. People expected the job to be handed to Bill Yoast, who won the championship the previous year for Hammond, and also possessed the most wins ever for that school. Choosing Boone over Yoast caused a stir in the community because of the color of Boone's skin. The fact that Coach Yoast was successful made it seem as though the decision to make Boone head coach was racially inspired.

With the conjunction of three schools many students wanted to play football. The team consisted of 87 players and every one of them had the option to leave the team. Coach Boone did not cut players based on their ability, all players were welcome, talented or not. The only way that a player was to leave the team was from his own

admission. With that being said, Coach Boone conducted things in such a way that it was easy for a player to want to quit and never come back and play. However, while Boone coached with certain harshness, most players realized the intentions behind it. They realized that rewards would flow from the work they put in.

Jim Brown is quoted as saying, “Racial harmony was insisted upon, and it prevailed.” Not only were the players required to look beyond skin color, but so were the coaches. As far as Boone was concerned, race was not going to be a factor in his team’s success or failure. They simply had to learn to look past it and live with it. Those who did not abide by these rules had to deal with Boone personally, which would not be a pleasant experience.

In dealing with a team of people from all different backgrounds, races, and talents, Boone was able to create vision for the team that every player was expected to live up to. Player Rufus Littlejohn stated, “He was an authority that I didn’t want to challenge. He and the other coaches came to practice organized and prepared. We didn’t waste time or energy. Any punishments were channeled into football related training (ie. running laps or sprints). No nonsense- do your work then you can have fun.” This is powerful in that it portrays a coach with one thing on his mind, excellence. It was demanded from everybody, and it did not matter who you were. There was no reason not to deliver. Boone did not favor players that he had previously coached. He promoted a program where everyone had to earn their position and their place on the team. Tom Lewis stated that, “We were fairly deep at all positions because of the merger of the 3 schools. That meant that if you messed up very often you could and would be replaced. We all had that in the back of our minds. But in addition to that, you knew everyone on



special teams, offense, or defense was playing their hearts out. You didn't want to let the next guy down by performing poorly."

Boone did not stop at coaching; he was interested in the success of his players as people. "For a lot of those guys he was the discipline in their lives and he did truly care about all of us doing well, both on the field, in the class room, and in life beyond school" (J. Brown). Although his focus was on having a great football team, it was not his primary objective. He focused on building and developing the players as people, and not just football players. In doing this, the team developed as people and were thriving not only on the field, but off the field as well.

### **Inspire a Shared Vision**

When Coach Boone started as head coach for T.C. Williams High School, one would have been pessimistic in thinking that he could inspire high-school teenagers to play as one unified team when considering their differences. However, Boone had a vision for the team and it was made clear from the beginning – respect and work hard to play good football. Although Boone did not inspire the vision for racial harmony as Martin Luther King, Jr. or Malcolm X did, he still inspired the players (indirectly) to work together as one regardless of their race or their position on the team. Boone wanted the players to realize that respect was a key component for playing football as a unified team. One of the players, Petey Jones, remembers Boone preaching respect right from the start when their season first began. Boone inspired the players and the coaches to respect each other by talking and learning about each other. During that time, it was easy

to say you did not like someone based on their race or color of their skin, but Boone showed the players that respect came from knowing each other. The team would not be successful without respect because respect was the foundation that made the individual players play as one team.

Tom Lewis believes that Coach Boone also inspired the vision for discipline, hard work, and implementation. He knew what could happen once they came together as a team because he had seen it happen before. He also wanted to inspire them so they could see and want the same vision. Boone inspired the team to work hard and do their best by expecting and only accepting the best. By presenting a strong and tough image to the players, they were inspired to work hard and show Boone that they were great players (Lewis). Although Boone was strict, he was like this because he saw the potential in his players. Nonetheless, the team began to see the same vision and eventually came together as a team by respecting each other and Coach Boone. Their hard work and determination inspired from Boone led them to a terrific regular season and state championship.

### **Encourage the Heart**

Coach Boone was a tough coach, but a coach who truly cared about his players individually and as a whole. Some of the players admitted to the impact that Boone had on them later in their lives because he taught them how to be successful by taking advantage of the opportunities they were given (Alderson). There were definitely times when some of the players wanted to quit and give up, but most of them did not quit.

Boone started with a little less than 100 students, and ended the season with about 87 students. This goes to show that the students did want to play football, and they wanted to show Boone how successful they could be. Boone never told a player to quit and if they did quit it was by their own choice.

In Kouzes and Posner, it explains one of the ways in which a leader recognizes contributions by showing appreciation through fostering positive expectations (325). Boone fostered positive expectations by expecting nothing but the best from the team. They may have expected to just play football, but Boone had a positive expectation for the team and that was for them to play at their best. Kouzes and Posner also discussed how you should celebrate the values and victories by showing passion and compassion (351). Boone was very tough on the players and would even get very upset during practice, but later he would sit with a player one on one and talk to him about things. He showed the team he was very passionate about football and winning, but he also made it clear that he cared about the lives of his players.

When a leader encourages the heart, the intrinsic rewards should be greater than the extrinsic rewards. Of course the team was successful and received public attention, but they were more motivated to continue playing because they wanted to show Coach Boone that they were good. The players felt accomplished, proud, confident, and respected. Although it did help that they won games, they were encouraged to continue playing because they felt like their hard work had paid off and they felt like they were an inspiration to their community.

## **Conclusion**

While researching for this paper we have found many players who are still inspired by Herman Boone's leadership. The players have fond memories of their coach that led with a style that was harsh, but fair. The disciplinary style came at a time of racial unrest and the collaboration of three schools into one. Where many mistakes could have been made, Coach Boone and his staff were well organized and they all knew their roles with the team. The ultimate goal of a winning season turned into much more for the players who have taken the traits exemplified by Boone during that winning season and have utilized them in their lives today, 34 years later. This sustained dedication to their coach shows the extent to which a good leader can truly affect one's life.

## **Bibliography**

Alderson, Fred. E-mail. 2 April 2005.

Brown, James "Jim". E-mail. 2 April 2005.

"Brown versus Board of Education". 1 April 2005 <<http://www.brownvboard.org/>>.

Davis, Lee Roy. E-mail. 2 April 2005

Jones, Tom "Petey." Telephone Interview. 29 Mar. 2005.

Kouzes, James and Barry Posner. The Leadership Challenge. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. San Francisco:  
Jossey-Bass, 2002.

Lewis, Tom. E-mail. 3 April 2005.

Littlejohn, Rufus. E-mail. 4 April 2005.