



Ashridge Manor, Forest Road  
Wokingham, Berkshire  
RG40 5RB United Kingdom  
T +44 (0) 118 974 2352  
F +44 (0) 118 979 7757  
W [www.liwleadership.com](http://www.liwleadership.com)  
EMEA – USA – ASIA PAC

## LETTER TO THE TIMES

Dear Sir

Oscar Wilde mused that *“success is a science...if you have the conditions you get the result”*.

In the wake of England's ignominious exit from the 2010 World Cup in South Africa much soul searching will occur to understand why. The key question that underpins this brainteaser is: why individual players, with a proven track record of accomplishment at the highest levels of the world club game, were unable to combine their knowledge, experience and skills to become greater than the sum of the parts? The brutal reality is that England's 2 plus 2 equalled 3, whereas Germany's 2 plus 2 equalled 5. Understanding the conditions for success would help those charged with the future of the England team understand why?

**COMPETENCE** is fundamental. *Knowledge and skill* form the basis of the players' competence but without the right *behaviour and attitude* these skills are neutralised. We have witnessed examples of behaviour by some players before and during this tournament which suggest that individual behaviours were not optimised to deliver success. Examples on and off the field of play include: questionable moral standards, players publicly briefing against the management, hints at boredom and lethargy, petulance and ill-discipline. Behaviour is an individual's choice and responsibility in a team and it centres on the suppression of one's own personal objectives and needs when they conflict with those of the team. The evidence would suggest that despite their hackneyed 'world-class' tag the England team (the whole team by the way, not just the players that took the field during the tournament) was not competent to deliver success at the World Cup.

But it would be simplistic to suggest that poor behaviour is the crux of the issue. **CLARITY** is a vital condition for success. The evidence points to ambiguity throughout England's campaign. The most important factor that must be crystal clear is the common purpose, the mission that unifies every team member and that ensures alignment and ruthless focus regardless of how events unfold. In this case it seems straightforward enough - surely the unifying purpose for England was to win the World Cup. The evidence suggests otherwise. Capello's espoused vision reached its limit at making the final. The players seemed even less clear: 'go as far as we can', 'do well', 'put in a performance'. If the England team were too cautious to even say the words what chance did they have of actually doing it? To be clear - I am not talking about arrogance or over-confidence here, I refer to absolute clarity of purpose. In truth, even winning the World Cup may fall short as a powerful unifying force, for it focuses on the form of the goal (i.e. what it looks like) not the essence (i.e. what it stands for). Clive Woodward's England in 2003 felt that winning the Rugby World Cup was still not a powerful enough motivator, for that team 'to inspire a whole country' became the essence that drove them to drive through adversity and fulfil their collective and individual potential. The Springboks in 1995 were similarly inspired. Clarity of purpose is at the top of the clarity hierarchy and underneath sit other key components: roles and responsibilities, accountability and values, to highlight a few. How clear were the England players on

their specific contribution and role both on and off the field of play? John Terry's rampage up the field immediately prior to Germany's fourth goal is an example of one man trying to be every player on the pitch, with the inevitable consequence that he was unable to do his job for the team. His role as a leader of the team off the field was also ambiguous following his removal as Captain. The entire midfield played as though they never really understood what their primary role was and Wayne Rooney's job was unclear to everyone not least the player himself. This is not to suggest that great team players only contribute within strict boundaries but that they know how they fit into the team framework and they trust implicitly that every other player in the team will direct every ounce of their energy to do their part. In elite rowing a coxless 4 crew know that to win they must each do their 25%, no more - no less. If one rower tries to do more to compensate the timing, rhythm and trust required to beat the best in the world will be compromised.

Clarity generates a mindset that leaves no stone unturned in the pursuit of the goal but clarity alone is not enough. The **CLIMATE** within which the team operates must be right. This third major condition, necessary for success is often the most difficult to grasp as it relies as much on soft, nuanced factors as hard structural and environmental concerns such as the proper resources. A glance at England's preparation implies that they had an abundance of coaches, managers and administrators and they were afforded the best possible training and living facilities. Certainly none of the players can feel inadequately compensated financially for their efforts. It appears that the 'hard' elements required to set the right climate were well taken care of. Despite this the evidence points to a climate incompatible with team success. There has been much speculation about the atmosphere of fear that the 2010 England team have operated within. Central to this is the leader's behaviour and the example they set, and in this case Fabio Capello must come under scrutiny. His autocratic leadership style and harsh demeanour would make it difficult for players to feel that they could contribute their ideas and feelings without fear of reproach. Ironically even if, as he suggested in a recent interview, his 'door is always open' his tone and body language contradicted that assertion. This appears to have led to a tactical approach that the players did not believe in and appeared not to maximise their strengths. Other important factors that accentuate an inspiring climate include trust, mutual respect, a no-excuses culture and many more. All of these elements would merit attention as the inquiry into England's failure unfolds.

Success is complex – as Oscar Wilde suggests, it is a science as much as an art. There are an extraordinary number of factors that contribute to success and the truth is that even if you address them all you still might not achieve it (you can't legislate for a Uruguayan referee) – and thank goodness because that is what makes life worth living. My experiences as a soldier and as a leadership and team development coach lead me to the conclusion that in the game of life a focus on setting the conditions for success (**Clarity, Climate and Competence**) shortens the odds considerably and improves significantly the chances of enjoying the journey as well as arriving at the destination.

## **Mark Norton MA, MBA**

Director, LIW

M +44 (0) 7900 910 702

F +44 (0) 1189 797 757

E [mark.norton@liwleadership.com](mailto:mark.norton@liwleadership.com)

W [www.liwleadership.com](http://www.liwleadership.com)