Chess and Checkers

Teaching Image Three

Summary
In checkers, all the game pieces move in the same way. In chess, you move each piece differently based on its ability. Wise leaders play chess, not checkers, as they manage relationships. They connect with individuals based on their unique personality and strengths.

Chapter Objectives

1. To motivate leaders to take the time to really acquaint themselves with team members.

2. To illustrate why leaders benefit from relating to their team members based on their unique strengths.

3. To show the value of playing chess in relationships instead of checkers, where everyone is treated alike.

4. To teach the four discoveries leaders must make in order to play chess with their team.

Creative Ideas

Bring playing cards to your session with your group or class. Divide them into groups of 4. *Note: Group sizes can vary depending on how many people are present.* Tell them they have 5-10 minutes to collaborate with one another to see how high they can stack the playing cards without them falling to the table. Who wins? Discuss with everyone how they went about working together (or not working together) in stacking the cards on one another. How did everyone in their groups communicate? Did anyone step up as a leader? Could you see your teammates strengths come into play?

Have your group or class stand up. Tell them to group up in pairs (2). For 2 minutes, have them stand in front of their partner and look at each other from head to toe. Then, have everyone turn around (not facing their partner), and change 5 things about yourself. (Examples: Take a shoe off, put your hair in a ponytail, remove an earring, take your belt off, roll your sleeves up, etc.) After another 2 minutes are up, have everyone turn back around and see if they can figure out the 5 changes your partner made to him/herself.
**Movie Ideas**

**School of Rock**
Scene: Time 29:21 – 31:32
In this scene, Dewey Finn (Jack Black) plays a substitute teacher in an elementary school. He knows nothing about teaching; he is a washed up guitar player in a rock band. However, once he observes the talent in the classroom full of students he oversees, he immediately begins forming a “band” based on the strengths and personality of each student. It is a humorous, yet classic example of a leader playing “chess” instead of checkers with a team of people. Talk about how natural it was to position the musicians once he knew what they could do. Discuss why more leaders fail to do this.

**The Blind Side**
Scene: 1:08:23 – 1:12:22
In this scene, football player Michael Oher (Quinton Aaron) is not responding to his coach’s checkers-style leadership. When Leigh Anne Tuohy (Sandra Bullock), his adoptive mother, plays chess with Oher, he impresses the whole team with his skill. You must remember you need to learn more about who people are and think of them as people. As a leader, it is important to use each team member to their strengths, and learn to work with one another.

**Toy Story**
Scene: 1:01:02 – 1:04:10
When Buzz Lightyear is captured by the bully, Sid, Woody mobilizes the unique talents of Sid’s deformed and mutated toys to escape from Sid’s room and teach the boy a lesson. It is working with a team that you will excel and go beyond what you could have imagined. Implementing everyone’s talents will help you accomplish your goals.
In checkers, all the game pieces move in the same way. In chess, you move each piece differently based on its ability. Wise leaders play chess, not checkers, as they manage relationships. They connect with individuals based on their unique personality and strengths.

Going Deeper

Marcus Buckingham has said, “The job of the leader is to turn talent into performance.” We do this best when we identify the strength inside of a person and allow them to capitalize on it. People are energized when they work in the areas of their strengths, and they are de-energized when they have to work in their weak areas. It just makes sense to allow people to remain in their areas of strength, where they are more influential, intuitive, natural, comfortable and fulfilled.

A Scale of One to Ten

Let me illustrate. Picture a scale of one to ten. The one represents “weak” and the ten represents “strong.” Imagine that you have a weakness that rates about a “3” and a strength that rates about an “8.” Now let me ask you a question. When you see a weakness with a low score and a strength with a high score -- which are you prone to work on? My guess is you will say the weakness. After all, no one wants to have glaring weaknesses. We all want to be Renaissance men and women!

Now consider this. If you were a “3” on the scale and you began working on that weakness, you could labor for months, grunting and groaning, and never push it past a “4” or a “5.” Think about it. If that’s true, you are now right in the middle of the scale. You are average. People don’t pay for average. We never want anything average -- an average movie, an average cup of coffee, etc. People desire excellence. We will go to stores that specialize in certain products for the excellence we know we will find there. Consider what would have happened if you would have focused on working on the “8” and pushing it up to a “10.” Wow. People pay for “10s.” It actually makes more sense to recognize that everyone has some weaknesses and the smartest use of our time is to work on excelling at our strengths!
This is so counter intuitive for us, however. We feel imbalanced when we focus on our strengths or someone else’s strengths. For example, when you were young in elementary school, do you remember bringing home your report card? Suppose you brought home three As, two Bs, and a D. Which of these subjects would your mom or dad ask you to work on? Probably the D. We naturally want to make everyone’s weakness a strength. It is time we learn to focus on letting a Bishop or a Rook or a Queen play the role they are most designed to play!

**Big Deal Question:** Why do so many of us fail to recognize the power of focusing on strengths?

**Reflect and Respond**

The best way for a leader to build an effective team is to identify how each one is different and how to successfully incorporate those differences into the overall plan of action. The strength that each person possesses meets a certain need on the team. Great managing is not about control, but about connection and release.

1. Explain what this phrase means. “Great managers understand you can’t get the best out of people by playing ‘checkers’ with them.”

2. Why is it we naturally expect others to be like us? Why are we more comfortable with people who are similar to us?

3. What are the four qualities that leaders must identify in each team member in order to play “chess” instead of “checkers”?

4. Describe the benefits of learning how to capitalize on each person’s strengths.
Self-Assessment

Evaluate how well you connect with people based on their unique strengths. Besides giving them personality tests and learning style assessments, try observing your group and asking yourself:

1. Do I understand the personality of each member? Do I see how they work best together?

2. Do I know what motivates each one of them?

3. Do I recognize the primary strength the individual brings to the group or team?

4. Do I realize how they best learn something new?

Exercise

Meet with your group and ask them these questions. Tell them it will help you play “chess” better.

1. For Strengths: What was the best day at your job this past year? Or describe your perfect job. What is it you’d really like to do and feel you would do well?

2. For Triggers: What was the best relationship you ever had with a manager or teacher? What made that person so motivating? What was the best praise you ever received?

3. For Personality: When you work on a project with a team, what do you like best: Getting results? Just being together? Doing the project with excellence? Having fun?

4. For Style of Learning: In your past jobs, when did you feel you were learning the most? Why did you learn so much? What’s the best way for you to learn?