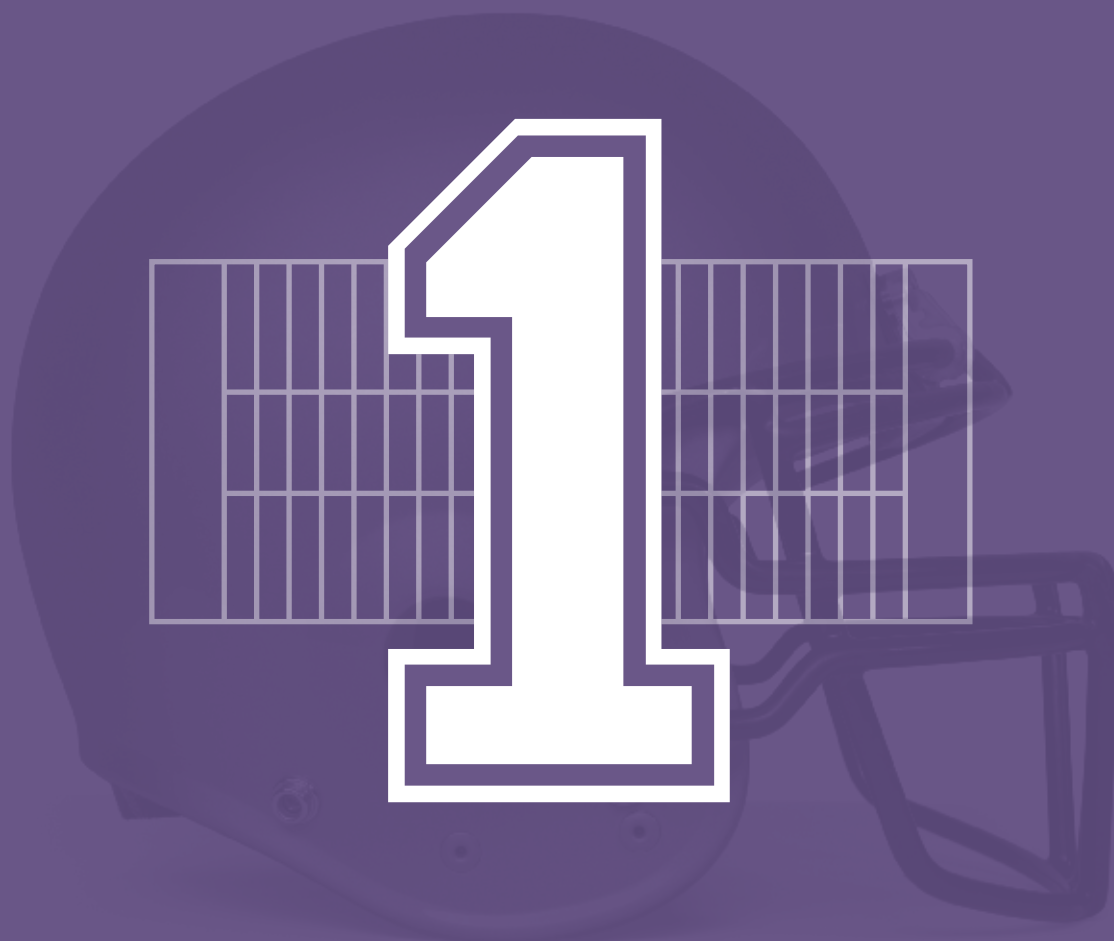


THE WHOLE NINE YARDS



Super Bowl-winning coach **Brian Billick** tells Brunswick's Tom Williams about motivating millionaires, staying focused, and why the *right* questions matter as much as the answers

For hardened sports fans in the United States, the end of summer and onset of fall means one thing: the kickoff of the National Football League (NFL) season. Baseball may be America's pastime and basketball its most successful sporting export, but for most fans in the States, football – American style – is king.

The pinnacle of the sport is the Super Bowl, the season's final spectacle played in late January or early February, which has become a domestic and global broadcasting phenomenon, with this year's event attracting a record-breaking 111m television viewers in the US alone.

Few have played in a Super Bowl and fewer still have prevailed in one, but Brian Billick is one of the rare owners of a coveted gold and diamond winner's ring. In 2000, in only his second season as Head Coach of the Baltimore Ravens – which ranks as the 10th most valuable NFL franchise out of 32, according to *Forbes* – Billick guided the team to a decisive 34-7 victory over the New York Giants. For seven more years as Ravens' Head Coach, he forged a reputation as an innovator and a maverick. Case in point: on the heels of the team's Super Bowl win, he became the first NFL coach in history to allow HBO – the cable television network probably best known for *The Sopranos* – to film pre-season training camp, uncut and unedited. The show, *Hard Knocks*, subsequently became ritual viewing in the lead-up to the kickoff of the NFL season.

With all this football success, as well as a degree in communications, surely Billick had the pre-match motivational team talk perfected?

"You know the word 'motivation' is an interesting one to me. I found that any motivational speech I gave in the locker room lasted about as long as it took to run down on a kickoff, get knocked on your backside, and come up looking through your ear hole," says Billick.

For him the real key to success is not a speech, it is about effectively communicating a vision internally and ensuring people understand what it will take to accomplish shared goals. It is not a quick fix; on the contrary, "This is where the heavy lifting comes in, because it needs to be constant and continuous interaction. And this interaction needs to be done on an individual basis because each colleague is going to filter that message and that vision differently. So you have to work hard to ensure they understand."

That may sound straightforward, but how easy is it when you are surrounded in the locker room by towering egos with gargantuan salaries? Billick affords himself a chuckle, "I'm often asked how I handle players who, at least in *their* minds, think they're worth more to an organization

THE COACH'S TOP TIPS

- 1 Plan your work and work your plan
- 2 Don't mistake activity for productivity
- 3 Remember you are no more deserving nor are you going to work harder than your competition
- 4 Don't just spin your wheels, it won't just work out
- 5 Never think you have all the answers, you don't

Brian Billick Since leading the Baltimore Ravens to victory in the 2000 Super Bowl, Billick has forged a successful career as lead commentator with FOX and the NFL Network, and is an accomplished public speaker. His Twitter handle is @coachbillick and he can be reached c/o Octagon Speakers phil.depicciotto@octagon.com

than I am. The key for me is to generate a partnership. As a manager, or a CEO, or as a coach, you have to understand that your employees' individual aspirations aren't necessarily in total alignment with the overall goals of the organization. So you focus on making sure that your team understands how their aspirations are going to be best realized by the success of the organization as a whole."

Billick acknowledges that this is time-consuming, but he believes it is critical. "Given the avalanche of information that we now have, nothing is proprietary. Once, the head of an organization could throw down these lightning bolts

of inspiration and direction and be effective, but there is too much noise now. So it's heavy lifting. It's the constant interaction with your team to ensure they share your goals."

TAKE A KNEE

Billick's time as Head Coach of the Baltimore Ravens was hugely successful, but it was not without adversity: injuries, losing streaks and contract disputes with players, all while under the constant and intense pressure of the media spotlight.

How did he deal with it all? Billick is unequivocal: "It's all about good planning. You know you're going to have difficulties during a season. As a leader in any walk of life, if you have a problem and then you wake up the next morning and go 'Oh my God, what do we do now?' Well, then you're dead. You have to make people internally understand that whatever you're doing is not a knee-jerk reaction. It's not a panic. That you have a plan for it because you knew you were going to face that adversity at some point. You need to give people a sense of confidence that the organization has a structure that will deal with whatever adversity we face. Now that doesn't mean panic and anxiety isn't going to set in. But if you've done your homework properly, you've laid out the structure for the team, they can at least draw confidence that there is a process in place."

One remarkable and often overlooked statistic about Billick's time as Head Coach of the Ravens is that six of his assistants went on to become top coaches of other teams in the NFL. Interestingly, this was something Billick deliberately worked towards. "You have to recognize first that your coaches have individual agendas as well. That's human nature. So if you can be an organization that's known for nurturing coaches, and they know that if they come to your organization and do the right thing that you're going to help them achieve their goals, then you can get a lot out of them and they can eventually accomplish the things that they want to."

WIDE PURSUIT

As someone who came up through the ranks himself, perhaps Billick's success at nurturing coaches is down to his appreciation and understanding of what matters most at each step on the ladder. "I heard the legendary Bill Walsh, [three-time Super Bowl winner with the San Francisco 49ers], talk about it. He said it's like appreciating a piece of art. When you're manager of a division of a company or a positional coach, you get so close to your players or your people that you can sense the texture, the brush strokes, and the colors. But by being so close, you lose the bigger perspective. And as you

HARD KNOCK LIFE

Football has always been a tough game that takes its toll on players. According to the American College of Sports Medicine, the average career of NFL players is only 4.6 years. Careers can be cut short for many reasons but injury tops the list. The Ravens' ferocious 36-year-old linebacker **Ray Lewis** (below) is in his 16th year with the club and is a phenomenon. Once told he was too small to make it in the NFL, Lewis describes his job as linebacker thus: "To knock out running backs, knock out receivers and chase the football."



rise through the ranks, you have to step back a little, have that broader vision. In football, when you become head coach, you sacrifice some of the day-to-day interaction with the players because you have to be that guy who can maintain the overall vision for the organization.”

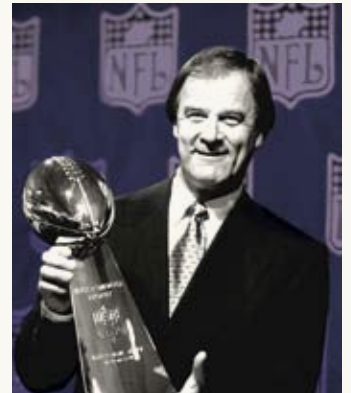
It is a word Billick uses often: vision. So if he always kept sight of the overarching vision, did that mean he always knew what to do, always had a ready answer? He shakes his head, smiling. “The guy you need is not the guy who has all the answers. It’s the guy who knows the right questions. I always found it amazing how informative it could be for an organization if I could simply provide them with the right question.”☺

Tom Williams is a Director in Brunswick’s Washington, DC office advising on public policy, crisis and issues management. Despite the handicap of being British, he closely follows the NFL and is an avid Green Bay Packers fan.

Jamaal Mobley from Brunswick’s Washington, DC office also contributed to this story.

“WINNERS NEVER QUIT”

Vince Lombardi was the near-mythical Head Coach of the NFL’s most storied franchise, the Green Bay Packers. If he wasn’t real, Hollywood would have invented him. He was a workaholic who demanded the same from his players: “Show me a good loser and I’ll show you a loser,” was just one memorable quote on the way to five NFL Championships. The NFL’s Super Bowl trophy still carries his name, a reflection of his unique and indelible influence on the game.



HUT ... HUT HUT

Football, like many sports, used to require players to line up on both offense and defense. This persists in the lower reaches of the amateur game but the professional game requires increasingly specialized roles. The place kicker is perhaps

the best known of the specialized positions (he only does kickoffs and field goal attempts and is notoriously reluctant to tackle). But perhaps the most obscure specialized role to emerge is the long snapper. His job is solely to snap the ball between his legs to a kicker.



POPULARITY STAKES

Baseball was America’s favorite sport for a century but over the past two decades football has gained at baseball’s expense. According to a Harris Interactive poll, NFL is now the favorite of 31 per cent of Americans compared to 17 per cent for baseball. There are many demographic explanations but superior marketing is key. Basketball has also suffered a sharp dip since its peak in the 1990s when Michael Jordan dominated the game.

Photographs: Al Messerschmidt/Getty Images; Larry French/Getty Images; Roberto Schmidt/AFP/Getty Images; Getty Images.