

## REVIEW



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Values make the organisation as well as the men and women within the organisation. What are you passionate about?

# FACE VALUES

SEAN FITZPATRICK

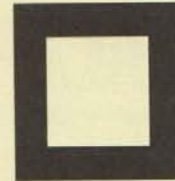
## WHAT IT TAKES TO CAPTAIN THE MIGHTY ALL BLACKS — AND LESSONS FOR BUSINESS

*Sean Fitzpatrick is a legend of international rugby and international sport. He was captain of the New Zealand rugby team, the All Blacks. He played 92 international matches for the All Blacks from 1986 to 1998, including a world record 63 consecutive Test matches and 51 Test matches as captain of New Zealand. He captained the All Blacks in the classic 1995 World Cup Final against South Africa. Fitzpatrick remains closely involved in rugby — as an author, journalist and pundit. He is on the main board of Harlequins RFC and is the co-founder and director of Front Row Hospitality, which includes the sport-to-business leadership company Front Row Leadership — offering consultation, leadership and motivational advice to companies. Des Dearlove talked to him about leadership and life after the All Blacks.*

“You’ve got to have that real fear of failure — you’ve got to be able to harness that fear of failure.”



SEAN FITZPATRICK: OUT OF THE BOX LEADERSHIP



*A lot of people talk about leadership in a highly theoretical way, but you were at the sharp end with the All Blacks. What's your take on leadership?*

I am a bit of a cynic on leadership. I never saw myself as a leader. I was happy just to be part of a team. It wasn't until I became the All Black captain that it really dawned on me what leadership was all about. I didn't feel comfortable captaining the All Blacks probably for the first two or three years. But the key advice I got when I first became captain was to lead by example.

When I think about all the great leaders that I've admired over the years, and the people that I've played under, the leaders that I admired are the ones that actually did the job — fronted up and led by example. So that, for me, is the key. Another thing I learned early on was that you don't necessarily need to be liked, but you need to be respected. And how do you gain that respect? By leading by example. Leading by example is such a key ingredient in successful organisations.

*So, say it's half time and things aren't going well, what would your captain's talk be about?*

It's crucial in any organisation that you all contribute. People say to me you were a great captain, and Martin Johnson was a great captain for England, and there are great world leaders. But when you look at it a bit closer, all those great leaders and great captains had great men and women around them. It's about getting the best out of those people around you, and giving them the opportunity.

So when we were walking off at half time, and we're not doing what we thought we would be doing, it's a case of bringing everyone together and saying, Des, what are we doing? Why aren't we doing this? Are we meant to be in that part of the field? How do we get down there? And then it's about everyone contributing and putting it

into a pot. Sure, you're the one who has to make the hard calls here and there, but at the end of the day you're only as good as the people around you.

*So you try to talk to the leader within each player?*

We had 15 players in the All Blacks, in terms of the players that take the field, and every one of those players has to be able to make key decisions at vital times. I talk a lot about the fear of failure. You've got to have that real fear of failure — you've got to be able to harness that fear of failure.

That's something a lot of business people don't really appreciate. Being a CEO of a multi-national company is fine, but when you're the CEO, the captain, of a huge, huge organisation like the All Blacks, when the whole country expects you to win, it can create a lot of pressure.

*But that fear of failure can also be disempowering. If you've ever watched England play football, it can come down so hard and so heavy on them that it stifles the team?*

You need to have the confidence. In New Zealand, we live in a country of four and a half million people, and we see those four and a half million people as shareholders of our organisation, the All Blacks. And every one of those four and a half million expects us to win — which for me is a wonderful thing, and long may that continue. But in doing that there's a massive fear that you're going to lose. And for me personally, and the All Blacks, it was being able to harness that fear of failure.

And I was involved in teams that couldn't harness that fear of failure, and we didn't win. But if you can harness that fear of failure, and you have the confidence through the senior management, the coaches, and the players to express yourselves, then you can be a successful team. And for me, the good teams I was involved in were the teams that had a fear of failure but were able to harness it, and

the way they were able to harness it was by doing everything they could to make sure they were going to win.

I'm not talking about cheating, but I am talking about making sure you practice. You spend so much time analysing the opposition, analysing your own performance, and then when it comes to the event, the match day, you're confident to try things. If you watch the great golfers of the world, probably 90 per cent of their shots are risky shots, but more often than not they come off, because they practice.

*Lots of people will have seen the film Invictus, about how Nelson Mandela used the 1995 Rugby World Cup to unite South Africans. You were on the wrong side of that particular moment in history. What was it like from your side, to see Mandela wearing the Springbok shirt?*

There aren't many days go by that I don't think about that final. And although we didn't win, when I look back on it, it was an incredible experience and I learned such valuable lessons through it.

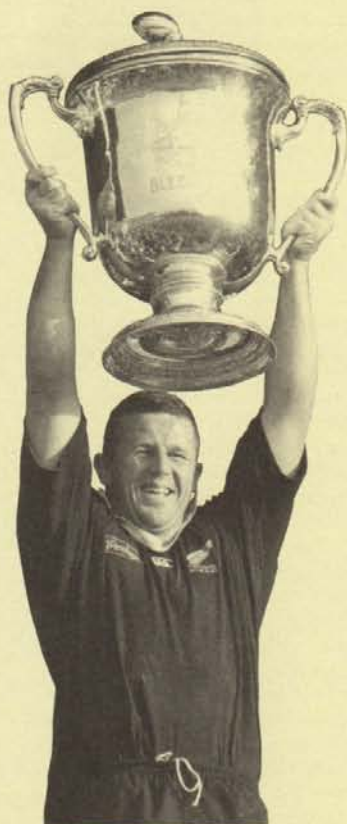
As New Zealanders, coming from this small country on the edge of the world, we were always up against it. We never had the flashy training aids, and the world was always against us, which we loved. It was always about silencing the crowd. A hostile environment like that can be very, very intimidating, but it can also bring you very close to take on the world. We'd always say as soon as we silenced the crowd, we knew that we're doing pretty well.

But in 1995, it was just an extraordinary experience to be in an environment like that, in a country like that. Historically, the rugby team was very unpopular with the black South Africans. When we went to the World Cup in 1995, we probably had about 45 million South Africans supporting us, and the South African team themselves had about four million. It wasn't until Mandela put his arm around Francois



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FIZPATRICK RAISES THE BLEDISLOE CUP, 1995

Pienaar, the South African captain, and started using the slogan “One team, one country,” that it suddenly changed. By the time we reached the final there were 49 million South Africans against us, which can be, you know, rather intimidating.

*What lessons did you take away from that experience?*

The week before, we had performed outstandingly well. We didn’t change our game plan enough when we played against South Africa. I think we misread the environment that we were going into. There are parallels here with business. You can operate in New Zealand as a business but when you go only 3,000 miles across to Australia it can be a totally different environment, and it’s how you adapt to that environment.

In ’95, in the space of six days, that environment changed from what it was in the previous six weeks, where they had a real siege mentality. By the final it was the whole of South Africa against us, basically. And by the end of it, it was probably the whole of the world against us. I don’t think we adapted well enough to that, and there were a few other mitigating factors that came into it.

*Presumably you had a chance to meet Mandela? What was that like?*

I’ve met Nelson Mandela a few times, and he just has a presence about him. I’m sure that you could name a number of leaders or captains of industry or sport that when they walk into the room they have a real presence. Nelson Mandela has all that, and more.

*What did you learn from Mandela?*

One of his sayings lives with me. He says the world is a circle; it’s not a straight line. And he probably exemplifies that more than anyone in terms of where he’s been. It’s a very, very good saying to have in your armoury. Just remember that — that the world is a circle, it’s not a straight line, and things do come back and come around.

*You spoke earlier about adapting. Every great player eventually has to hang up his boots and move on. Was that an easy transition for you — going from being the player on the field to watching?*

I was ready to retire. I retired a happy man. Although I had an injury, I’d been thinking of retiring for a number of years. When I think of the joy I got when I did retire, and life carried on, I look back and wonder why it was so hard to actually let go? I probably hadn’t harnessed that fear of failure, of actually moving on to the next stage in life.

You can see that with business people who get ingrained into a position, whether it be at the bottom of the work chain or the top of the tree. Once they’re ingrained in there, it can be very difficult for people to let go of what they’re comfortable with, the security, so that they can move on to the next stage of their life. And that was something that I found very difficult — actually letting go of that All Black environment that had been my life for 12 years, and moving on.

But once I actually did that, I was very fortunate. I had good people around me to advise me — and it’s been a great experience. As I said, it helps that I retired a happy man in terms of what I had achieved in the sport.

*So on match day, you’re okay with being the spectator? Or is that desire to play still there?*

No, I’m totally over it. It comes down to what really matters to you. What’s the most important thing in life to you? When you want to be involved in a world-class environment, and the best team in the world, or the best company in the world, how do you achieve that? And for you to achieve that, you need everyone in your team putting that as the main thing in their life.

Something I didn’t even realise until I retired was that for 12 years, playing for the All Blacks that had been the most important thing in my life, even before my family. And your whole life is dedicated to that sport. It’s what you eat, what you drink, what time you go to bed, where you go on your holidays, your training



routines. And when I retired, it gave me the opportunity to move on and to have, you might say, a normal life. People say to me what's the most important thing in life now?

*And what do you say?*

Well, at certain times of the year, work is number one, family is number two, and at the other times, family is number one. People say that's pretty hard-nosed in terms of making your family number two, but you have to be honest with yourself and the people you care about. If you go down to the City of London and you say to the bankers what's the most important thing in life, the majority of them will say family is number one, work is number two. But if you're actually honest with yourself, and if you want to get the best out of yourself, you've got to say, well, actually, I spend 80 to 90 hours a week at work, so how can family be number one?

Work is number one, so the family buys into it. This is where we're going, this is what we want to do, and then you all get into it.

So my wife knew how important the All Blacks was to me. And when our children came along, we'd sit down every year and talk about it. If I get into the All Blacks, we're going to be away 200 days. Do we want to go down this road? And they'd all say yes dad, let's go, and we'd all buy into it. So in doing that you'd have to make many sacrifices in other areas of your life.

*When you watch rugby now, do you watch it through different eyes? Do you see things that you didn't see?*

I think now, especially in our environment, it's become over analysed. The players have become students of the game. In my day, it was quite a simple game, really. Now it's a lot more complicated. The opposition know more about you. You know more about yourself, probably. So for me, I think it's a better game to watch, and I think the players are more in tune with what the coach is trying to do.

But in saying that, the coaches of the teams that are winning at the moment are the better coaches. In

our day, if you had the better players, and the coach was OK, you could get by. But now, although they're analysing more, the players may be more programmed than they used to be. In our day, you had to think about your own position a bit more, where now the players are programmed where they're going around the field. The players and the coaches and the managers of the successful teams are pretty much in tune now.

*In your career, you played under several different captains, but also in your business life you've encountered different leaders. How would you describe your own leadership style?*

I was a leader that led by example. I demanded a lot out of my players, but in doing that I had to demand a lot from myself. And I expected everyone to turn up, on a Saturday, ready to play. And very, very focused on having the attitude that winning is the only option.

*As a leader, what do you do if people aren't performing?*

If people aren't doing their bit, we sit down and we analyse each other's performance. We talk a lot about our strengths and weaknesses, what we're good at, what we're not good at. What we did well. And we're very, very open to each other. And at the end of the day it's about giving that ultimate performance, and that involves telling you you're not good enough, that you need to get better, or you're not devoting your time. If rugby is not the number one thing in your life, you need to reassess where you're at.

And if you're the star player in the team, we don't really care. We'd rather take a bit of pain and get rid of you, and have a player that is totally dedicated to where we want to go to. So it's a hard-nosed business. And the players who are in our club, they know that, and it's a wonderful environment to work in. ■

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