

Hit in the Head?

So Wladimir Klitschko is supposed to lecture on Change and Innovation Management at HSG, as one could read in June 2015 in the Tagesanzeiger. He claims to have developed strategies in his professional career which are in demand in business, too. His statement: „At the end of the day, it is all about endurance, flexibility, coordination, and concentration.“ Do you want to bet that soon there will be a book about „the Klitschko principle“?

Change? All right, if I get in the ring with Klitschko I will probably not be the same afterwards...innovation? I can use some of that looking for escape, but doesn't it say that creativity needs leisure? That's not the first word that comes to my mind thinking of Klitschko.

How absurd can it get? For how long will we go on celebrating this tough-guy-hero model?

Okay, it seems to be sexy to invite celebrities from sport, that their winner mentality may rub off on the management. Evelyn Binsack tells managers how close you are on the Everest to kick the bucket; group management teams let Ralph „endorphine“ Krüger whip them to euphoria for an afternoon („can't remember details, it went all so quickly, but spectacular. Splendid.“).

I don't mind letting yourself be inspired by exceptional human beings for a couple of hours, from time to time. But what exactly is the message? Hang on, even if you are close to handing in your chips? Never help anyone in the death zone? Beat your opponents to a pulp? I thought we were trying to get rid of the war and fight metaphors at last.

The compatibility of top-ranking athletes with a normal professional life in an organisation is about as high as the compatibility of an ex-marine with a bowling club. First of all, athletes experience a culture shock when entering an organisation: all of a sudden people are so lame, and then they even react oversensitively if you snub them for it...that results in change management by hammer. Except you have a fist like Klitschko, than that will do.

I have practiced competition Sport myself for years. I don't want to be without these years and without the things I learned or deepened. But to become a successful leader I had to learn a lot of quite different things, for example to win people who didn't line up to subordinate their lives to peak performance in the first place.

And there are indeed athletes who are able to communicate this: athletes who became great only after they worked things out with themselves, developed other facets of their personality than those strictly related to performance, and matured as human beings. There is a lot to learn from athletes and coaches; it's a mystery to me why everybody keeps looking at the martial and heroic aspects. As if we didn't have enough cases of burnout.

Sports at the top is an absolutely merciless environment. It produces a huge amount of hidden cases of athletes who break under this kind of pressure: depression, eating disorders, burnout, anxiety disorders. There is nothing on this side of the coin that business must copy.

In the future it will be not enough to be a tough hero. We have trained this quality enough, it is not what is missing. It's other things that will take us further.