

8 Halftime Questions

American Football is an excellent metaphor for business. Strategy, operational execution and teamwork all ultimately determine the performance of every team.

The most successful pro football teams have a secret weapon that receives very little publicity but really is an important success factor. This secret weapon is halftime! The best teams use this mid-game break not only to relax, rehydrate and regroup but more importantly to assess performance and revise strategy.

Your Game Plan

Most teams start each game with a set of 15-20 pre-scripted plays. The selection and design of these plays is based on careful study and analysis by the coaches of their competitor's performance over the past few games. Game videos and offensive and defensive patterns are studied in detail to assess competitive strengths, weaknesses and their strategy.

Only after this careful competitive assessment is completed, are the team's opening plays designed and organized. The coaches create these plays to capitalize on their teams' strengths while exploiting their opponent's weaknesses.

Once the overall game strategy has been developed, the team focuses next on implementing these customized plays, both offensively and defensively. There is an assumption that the proverbial basic blocking and tackling are in place through rigorous training camp drills and coaching feedback. Players without the necessary playing skills are not selected for the team.

In summary, during the real season, everything is focused on strategy and execution constantly assessing tactical effectiveness and competitive reaction. While the quality of the players do make a difference, even the best players fail to win games if the strategy, operational execution or teamwork is lacking.

The Head Coach is the leader of this entire process. In business, the CEO is this leader who must make sure that all the pieces are in place and operate effectively.

When the pundits say that football is a business, there really is a deeper meaning!

This analogy between football and business raises some very pertinent questions that every CEO should reflect upon.

1. Do we have the right players?
2. Do they have the right skills and can they perform consistently at the right level?
3. Have we assessed our market and competitors effectively?
4. Is our competitive assessment based on facts (have we really studied the game films)?

5. Do we have the right management team (coaching staff)?
6. Do we have a well thought out strategy and operating plan to execute our strategy?
7. Do we have the right measurements in place to assess performance?
8. Do we take the time to reflect on our performance and adjust our plan as necessary?

July: Time to re-evaluate

July, as the midpoint of your operational year, is a great time to take a step back and evaluate what has happened over the past 6 months. You started the year with an operational plan resourced for success and then things happened. Some of your initiatives succeeded. Some might have been implemented poorly and perhaps competitors thwarted some others.

Consider creating your own “business halftime” where you and your management team can go into the locker room, think about what worked and how to do more of those things. Identify where you have not been successful and either develop a plan to improve performance or change tactics. This is not a blame session or finger pointing exercise. It’s a time to take a thoughtful step back and assess year to date performance. Finally, you need to effectively communicate your performance and path forward to your board.

July is a great business halftime. Things slow down a bit. You have two quarters of results to assess performance and your competitive environment. High performing CEOs use this mid-year break productively to assess, revise and re-energize their business to succeed in the last two quarters. That’s what the best football team head coaches do. Even if their teams have not had a great first half, they regroup and come out fighting in the second half.

Some teams, who have played a good first half, rest on their performance, drink the Gatorade during halftime and make little if any adjustment. They assume that the competition will not react only to discover that the competitive world is never static. Usually, the results at year-end are not very acceptable.

Use July effectively as your personal halftime and you’ll surely be rewarded at year-end!