

# How to lead when you lead the best

With 101 tests and 185 One Day Internationals under his belt in his 11 years as an international cricketer, Gary Kirsten, leadership consultant, philanthropist and entrepreneur, is no stranger to the pressures that high-performing individuals endure every day. However, the pressure increased exponentially when he went on to coach the Indian national cricket team between 2008 and 2011, culminating in Team India winning the ICC Cricket World Cup in India. At a recent Glacier webinar, Gary reflected on what it means to be a leader of the best.

## Winning with winners

“What fascinates me is how to get the best out of people, even when they’re already the best”, says Gary. “The challenge was to create an environment where people who were the best, could perform even better.”

From early on, he realised that in his new role, he would need to focus beyond individual performance. In his own career, the emphasis had always been on the number of runs he’d racked up on the scoreboard. Was he winning or losing? That was always the question. Over time, he’d learned that performance is a marker. What’s important is to create a space where individuals are able to deal with not always racking up the runs.

“It’s similar in business”, says Gary. “Most managers just want to know what needs to happen to get to the next level of performance”. It was rare in his career that coaches wanted to know what was happening inside him, whether he was losing or winning. He’d always been intrigued by how a coach could influence his potential and he has been mindful of this in his own coaching role.

## Seven things Gary learned about leadership as a coach

1. The leader’s personality has to match the team. This fit is very important.
2. The team members probably have skills, qualifications and experience. The coach respects that and harnesses the collective talents to win.
3. A coach builds a narrative around a bigger cause.
4. It’s not a team if the individuals are playing to make a name for themselves. Without a bigger purpose, it’s a collection of individuals. A team has a bigger cause in mind that is

articulated by the coach.

5. Captains, like coaches, have to be good humans, understand people, treat people as individuals and show empathy.
6. Listen to your teammates and learn to take criticism well. The most useful feedback will come from your inner circle. Pay attention to this. Outside criticism is not as important.
7. Bow out of the game when you lose interest in learning and improving or when you feel there's little more that you can achieve.

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