Written by Julie Desmond
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Sunday afternoons are famous for football. In our house, football weekends begin Friday night at the high school, continue into Saturday at TCF Bank Stadium and wrap up on the living room couch Sunday afternoon, where hollering can be heard throughout the neighborhood. Words floating out the front door include some which won't be used here, a few versions of, "Are you kidding me?" and a healthy round of cheers once in a while. But my favorite is also one of the most common, "I can play better than that!"

Really? Turn down the volume; I think I hear an NFL recruiter knocking on your door.

Actually, do not quit your day job just yet. Often, people take the same approach to work that they do toward their favorite teams: they sit around and complain, and then wonder why no one is banging down the door to promote them.

Dante was the senior member of a department where there had been extensive change. He called it chaos. "These people need a leader," he said. "But they are too cheap to hire someone." Not having it in the budget is a good reason to not hire additional staff. Not having it in the budget this year means that next year things might be different and by next year maybe the money to hire a leader could be in the budget.

But the team needs a leader now. I suggested to Dante that he try something I've seen work successfully for many people in his predicament. "Just lead," I told him. By the look on his face, you'd think I had tackled him at the one yard line. Lead. Without a title. Without a promotion. And without being too obvious about it or alienating his peers.

Leaders lead. They lead without hesitation. Leaders make decisions based on quality information and solid experience. A leader constantly updates skills and knowledge to stay at the top of his or her game. And when the budget cycle shifts and the HR team agrees to hire a leader, who will they turn to first? The one who is already doing the work.

Who drafts a quarterback and then teaches him to throw? If you want to play pro football, you are going to have to get off the couch and prove that you can play. If you want a promotion at work, you are going to have to do the same.

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