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## Bill Parcells' Rules for CEOs

On October 8, 2007, future Hall of Fame coach Bill Parcells unveiled to a national audience tuned in to watch the Dallas Cowboys play the Buffalo Bills a list of rules quarterbacks must follow if they want to be successful in the National Football League.

Parcells' rules – particularly Rule #9 – proved prophetic that Monday night as the Cowboys overcame quarterback Tony Romo's five interceptions, a lost fumble and an eight-point deficit with 3:45 minutes in the game to win 25 – 24 in the final seconds.

CEOs are the quarterbacks of their team. Whether you're a veteran performer or a new leader – as Romo was at the time – these 11 rules could be helpful as you lead your team back from the worst recession in 80 years. The rules are Parcells'. The interpretations are mine.

1. **Ignore the opinions of others.** The CEO – like the quarterback – gets the majority of the blame or credit for the organization's failure or success. "My confidence doesn't waver," Romo said after the game. "Not everything is going to go your way. You've just got to keep going."
2. **Have fun, but class clowns can't run a huddle.** Leading people is like raising kids. You must decide if you want to be their friend or their parent. If you want your children to respect you, you must first be their parent. As the CEO, you're already the center of attention.
3. **Fat quarterbacks can't avoid the rush.** The job of being CEO is 24/7. It's physically and mentally grueling. If you're not regularly eating right, exercising to shake off stress and getting a good night's sleep, your decision-making will suffer. What's more, you may not be around to see your team win.
4. **Know your job cold.** For some CEOs, this rule is difficult. CEOs are fixers, and most want fast results. Your job as CEO boils down to a) defining and communicating reality, b) identifying opportunities for profitable growth, and c) inspiring your team to achieve that growth. It also means staying out of the way. Do your job, and hold those around you accountable for doing theirs.
5. **Know your own players.** What are their strengths? Weaknesses? What motivates them? Gallup's research over a 30-year period shows overwhelmingly that people are more successful when their strengths are leveraged. So avoid trying to improve someone's weakness. Instead, compensate for it. Play to strengths.
6. **Be the same guy every day.** It may be a cliché but it's also true that "tough times don't build character; tough times reveal character." Remember that you're always in the spotlight. How are you showing up?
7. **Throwing the ball away is a good play.** Know when to walk away. From an unreasonable customer. An unprofitable deal. A difficult or under-performing employee.
8. **Learn to manage the clock.** As a leader, you have three resources you can leverage to win. Talent. Treasure. Time. Time is the most precious because lost time can never be recovered. How do you and your team invest your time?
9. **You're not judged on stats and TD passes; get your team in the end zone.** Tony Romo set records that night for most interceptions in a game (5), most passes thrown (50) and most yards (309). None of that mattered. What mattered was Romo guiding his team on an 80-yard scoring drive that put his team in position to win with 20 seconds remaining.
10. **Don't panic in times of chaos.** Work from a written game plan so that everyone on your team knows what they must do to help your organization win. Recognize that it's lonely at the top. That's why I coach CEOs and lead groups of leaders that meet as monthly advisory boards ([Vistage International, the world's largest CEO organization](#)). Romo didn't panic. He and the team worked their two-minute game plan and won.
11. **Don't be a celebrity CEO.** As CEO, you receive credit and blame. (See Rule #1.) Accept the blame – after all, leaders get the behavior they tolerate. Share the credit. After the Buffalo game, Romo was quick to praise his team mates. "I think our team, outside of me, played an outstanding football game. They dug me out of it," he said. "That's a sign of a pretty resilient team."

Bill Parcells knows a thing or two about getting people to work together toward a common goal. That's the value of [strategic planning](#) sessions. Planning sessions are the training camp for you and your players to develop your game plan for the year ahead. With profound changes rocking the world, make sure you're ready for 2011.

Do you know how you and your team will win in 2011? ■