

Greg Abel

AFCF® CEO Coach of the Year®

By Paul Markgraff

The American Football Coaches Foundation® (AFCF) has named Gregory E. Abel, Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer of Berkshire Hathaway Energy, as the 2015 recipient of its CEO Coach of the Year Award.

This is the highest honor bestowed by the AFCF, whose inaugural recipient in 2006 was Jeffrey R. Immelt, the CEO of General Electric.

Former Domino's Pizza CEO David Brandon (2007), former MidAmerican Energy Holdings CEO David Sokol (2008), former HP CEO Mark Hurd (2009), FedEx Corp. Chairman and CEO Frederick W. Smith (2010), BP Capital L.P. Chairman and CEO T. Boone Pickens (2011), NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell (2012), ExxonMobil Chairman and CEO Rex W. Tillerson (2013) and AT&T Inc. CEO Randall Stephenson (2014) have all received the honor.

Abel was selected for the award by a unanimous vote of the AFCF Board of Directors. He will be honored at the AFCF's CEO Coach of the Year Dinner, held at The Waldorf Astoria® in New York, N.Y., on December 14, 2015.

"I am very honored to be receiving the award," says Abel. "I'd like to thank the AFCF Board of Directors, and most of all Coach Teaff, for his great work, his personal commitment to the youth of America through the game of football, and his friendship. I'd also like to thank the hundreds of coaches across the country who personally wrote me notes of congratulations. You can just feel their fundamental commitment to the sport, but more importantly to the children of America."

The Importance Of Leadership

The AFCF CEO Coach of the Year Award focuses heavily on leadership. The AFCA and the AFCF have a rich history of teaching coaches how to lead, how to mentor young individuals, how to groom the right assistants for the right jobs on the field, and how to win, even when the odds are stacked against them.

The importance the AFCA and AFCF place on leadership is synonymous with the importance of leadership in the business world. Abel recalls playing for various teams as a child, and the early lessons on leadership that he took away from them.

"I loved being on a team. I learned that first and foremost, I was going to have to work incredibly hard, and that should be a fundamental expectation I have of myself," he says. "I soon realized that the more we worked as a team, with each teammate working together with a common vision, we were more likely to be successful."

Abel believes those early lessons helped to shape the leadership he brings to Berkshire Hathaway Energy and other organizations in which he holds a leadership role.

"I strongly believe a leader must lead by example," he says.

"That starts with competence and a strong work ethic. Then, effective leaders must always be assessing their team and identifying ways to help them be successful. A leader must effectively communicate the purpose or goal of the organization.

"A leader must embrace with integrity, the strategy and culture of the organization. I think it's absolutely critical to lead with candor and optimism. Lastly, a leader must actively manage, prioritize and solve challenges."

For a leader to be successful, Abel says that each individual must believe he or she is part of the team, but the leader must set the large overall vision.

"Ultimately, it goes beyond even that," says Abel. "It goes beyond setting a bunch of rules. Leaders must

bring teammates along and make sure they strongly believe in the vision. I think that comes down to communicating with passion and managing with candor and optimism. There is an opportunity for us to be successful in whatever we define as our mission or goal, and we can achieve it together."

A Foundation Of Discipline

Discipline is critical to the success of all parts of an organization. If coaches choose to set the goal of becoming truly elite – meaning the best coach that coach can become – he must first master himself.

"On the football field as in the business world, discipline is necessary to achieve success," says Abel. "Complacency is something we as leaders must manage. We must recognize success as all part of a journey that is never going to be done. We'll never be done striving to be our best. Irrespective of what we've achieved, there is still room for improvement."



Gregory E. Abel
Chairman, President And CEO
Berkshire Hathaway Energy

Abel constantly challenges his team to have an appetite for learning. Through continued learning, teammates always understand that there is some measure upon which they can improve.

“We use that as a way to effectively maintain our own discipline within the organization and avoid complacency,” he says.

Discipline is nothing without goals. In football, as in business, individuals and teams cannot long succeed without planning and setting benchmarks.

“I start by encouraging our people to have a dream, and they should dream big” says Abel. “It doesn’t mean it’s going to happen tomorrow, but people should have that big dream.”

Then yes, organizations and teams should have measurable goals. By creating those goals and seeking their completion with discipline, each team member and the entire team learns to achieve success.

“Around most goals, teams can develop plans and begin to execute on those plans,” says Abel. “Then, measure and correct. As long as a team has some structure around devising its goals, the more likely that team is to achieve its goals. Understanding and striving for those goals can truly be a game-changer.”

Tackling Adversity


Many football coaches across the country mentor athletes who face real adversity, at home and on the field. Challenging this adversity can define the character of an individual, both positively and negatively, depending upon the outcome.

“Many of our nation’s schoolchildren face enormous adversity,” says Abel. “They are in a tough stage of their lives. Things can be even tougher if they don’t know where their next meal is coming from or they don’t have a physical home to go to at the end of the day. I’m so proud of our football coaches across the nation because they are out there on the front lines. They are having a positive impact on our nation’s children and the communities in which the coaches serve.”

Teams and organizations will face hardships, as well. To overcome adversity, all leaders must understand that they need to provide the right type of support to the individuals they serve.

“It’s easier to tackle a problem head-on if you’ve got the right support around you,” says Abel. “That problem isn’t going to overwhelm you when you’ve got people who care, people who are investing in you and are there to help you get through a difficult period. That problem becomes easier to face when you have a support structure.”

Fundamentally, it may be what coaches do best. The team then becomes a family unit that’s there to provide support and guidance to the individual when some help is needed.

“It’s important to have that safety net because it makes people confident that they can overreach in order to solve a problem,” says Abel. “They can push through the adversity, and if they fall, they don’t fall as far as they otherwise might.” 

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– SEC Strength And Conditioning Coach

“The TUG® provides a total body movement where core and lower limb speed strength are essential.”
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www.TheTug.net • Email: info@thetug.net

Garry Spurlock: 612-669-3158
Steve Zabel: 405-474-7777