



A Review of Jeff Benedict's [*The Dynasty*](#)

By Oren Abusch-Magder

When I failed my first patrol at Ranger School, I paused and told myself “we’re on to Cincinnati.” On September 30th 2014, the New England Patriots were drubbed 41-14 by the Kansas City Chiefs on prime time TV. Patriots head coach Bill Belichick was asked repeatedly by the press if Tom Brady would continue to start as quarterback. Belichick answered each question with the same phrase: “We’re on to Cincinnati.” The message to his team and to the world was clear: there was no looking back, just forward to next week’s opponent. The following Sunday, the Patriots upset Cincinnati and went on to win the Super Bowl that February. Since that week, I have used “we’re on to Cincinnati” as my personal mantra in order to move on from the past and stay focused on the future.

Jeff Benedict’s [*The Dynasty*](#) chronicles the last 25 years of the New England Patriots

franchise. It follows the three individuals Benedict identified as most influential to the team's success: owner Robert Kraft, head coach Bill Belichick, and starting quarterback Tom Brady. Together, in nineteen years, they led the Patriots to an unparalleled six Super Bowl wins, nine Super Bowl appearances, thirteen AFC Championship games, and seventeen division titles. The book offers a number of leadership lessons that have direct application to military leaders, including a caution about losing the public's trust.

Robert Kraft: Empowering Subordinates

Since the New England Patriots' inception, current owner Robert Kraft has been a Patriots fan. He bought season tickets in 1971 and the team in 1994. Upon purchasing the team, he has focused on two things: surrounding himself with people who knew more than him and empowering those people. Once he had chosen these individuals, he understood that his job as a leader was to empower and support his subordinates, rather than mettle or micromanage. This leadership philosophy stands in direct contrast to many NFL owners and military leaders who have micromanaged their teams to failure. For example, he hired Andy Wasynczuk to serve as the stadium's chief operations officer. It was Wasynczuk's first job in football, but Kraft did not care, because he thought Wasynczuk was smart, and Kraft trusted him to make good decisions despite his lack of any previous football experience. Wasynczuk turned a decrepit stadium profitable and became an integral part of Patriots management.

Yet nothing is more emblematic of Kraft's hands-off philosophy than his relationship with head coach Bill Belichick. In 2001, Belichick chose to keep back-up quarterback Tom Brady as the starter instead of Drew Bledsoe. Bledsoe had been the top overall draft pick, the previous starter, and he was back from injury, but Belichick chose to stick with Brady. It was a controversial and risky move. Yet, Kraft trusted Belichick's professional opinion. He overlooked the controversy and empowered Belichick to start Brady. That season, Brady led the Patriots to their first-ever Super Bowl victory. For his willingness to accept such risk, Belichick helped give him 6 Super Bowls, and [the best win percentage among active owners](#).

Bill Belichick: Do Your Job

Just a few weeks ago, Belichick made headlines when he showed up to a press conference in a tattered [shirt filled with holes](#). While many coaches greet the press in brand new team gear, Belichick has never been concerned with appearance. Instead, Belichick devotes his full attention to his team's on the field performance. This laser focus is displayed in Belichick's two mottos "do your job" and "no days off," which he has lived by for years. If a player doesn't meet the standard, they do not deserve to play. Belichick even benched running back Jonas Gray the week after Gray's breakout performance landed him on the cover of Sports Illustrated because Gray had [overslept his alarm](#). However, Belichick gives players a chance when they display a strong work ethic and potential, rather than focusing on superior physical acumen or great past performance.

Belichick has eschewed norms by turning wide receivers thought to be too short, such as Deion Branch, Wes Welker, and Julian Edelman, into pro-bowlers. Many players did not just tolerate Belichick's exacting standards but rather embraced them because his standards produce results. Veteran players have routinely taken pay cuts or cleaned up their off the field act because they knew that ego and pay had no place in a locker room focused on winning. Players work harder for Belichick, do their job, and take no days off because they know that his team culture places winning above all else. In the military, these values are lauded for just this reason: a culture of professionalism and hard work is one that brings results.

Tom Brady: Composed and Relentless

Tom Brady's success and longevity are unmatched in the football world. There is no secret to Brady's success (though he and his trainer may say that it is the [TB12 method](#)). He has committed himself to relentless self-improvement throughout his career. Benedict's book details how after tough losses, he would not go home, electing to stay at the stadium and start studying game tapes immediately. During offseasons, he practiced relentlessly,

committing to increased accuracy and quickness, despite his climbing age. It paid off. He has reached 15 Pro Bowls, earned 3 NFL MVP awards, made 9 Super Bowls and won 6 of them, and was named MVP in 4 of them. Since the age of 30, Brady has secured 11 Pro Bowls, 3 NFL MVP awards, 6 Super Bowl appearances, and 3 Super Bowl wins, and netted 2 Super Bowl MVPs.

Brady is also known for performing under pressure. When others lose their cool, Brady maintains his relaxed attitude and is able to work towards the goal. This calmness helped lead him to victory against the Atlanta Falcons in the 2017 Super Bowl. Benedict writes about Brady's demeanor on the sidelines and the locker room, as he constantly reminded his teammates that while they were behind, they still had a chance. Leadership is a turbulent endeavor. Brady reminds us that when looking for strong examples of leadership, we should model what right looks like for our peers.

Losing Trust: The Impact of the Patriot's Poor Reputation

Former West Point Superintendent, LTG(R) Robert Caslen has explained that public servants draw from a [bank of public trust](#). You make small deposits over time with acts of good faith, but a single slip-up can force you into bankruptcy. It is hard to gain, but easy to lose. This cautionary note is also sounded by Benedict's look at the Patriots. Each of the three main leaders he examined have had major scandals. Belichick was caught [illegally filming opponent's practices in 2007](#), Brady was accused of [deflating footballs before the 2014 AFC Championship game](#), and Kraft was charged with [paying for sexual favors](#). As a result, the reputation of the entire team continues to be marred by accusations of cheating. This is an important reminder: no matter how successful a team, one can never look past leaders who fail to uphold morals. Leaders must set the highest standards in all situations, but especially when others are not looking.

Learning From The Patriots

Overall, [The Dynasty](#) offers a never seen before look at the most successful sports franchise

of the 21st century. It is not just a narrative of success, but rather a leadership laboratory. Benedict's deep dive of Robert Kraft, Bill Belichick, and Tom Brady highlights their traits as leaders. They show us that trusting subordinates, attention to detail, and hard work create a culture of success. No matter one's background, leaders should pick up Jeff Benedict's [The Dynasty](#) today to expand their leader's toolkit.

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