



Learning Management Through Movies

SANJAY ROY CHOWDHURY Managing Director, Gray Matters Consulting

Coach Carter is a 2005 drama film released by Paramount Pictures, and directed by Thomas Carter. It is based on a true story, in which Richmond High School head basketball coach Ken Carter made headlines in 1999 for benching his undefeated team due to poor academic results.

Economic downturns are scary times for employees. Many firms cut personnel and add to the workload of the remaining employees. But few forward looking organizations utilize these 'slack' times for developing skills in their employees to build a 'lifetime' individuality. This would bring loyalty amongst employees and also help in build up a 'robust' corporation, which is great from its 'core'.

The movie 'Coach Carter' gives us a good understanding of how a basketball coach goes about bringing in a 'lifetime' individuality for all the players.

Carter was appointed as the coach to develop a winning team, but he sought to do that not only by teaching them basketball skills but also making them learn 'life skills'. At the end he creates an 'undefeated team' who plays the state championship, but more importantly they all get admission into good colleges for furtherance of their career.

The movie begins with a basketball team playing against St. Francis, only to end up with the teams fighting with each other. After the game, Kenneth Carter ([Samuel L. Jackson](#)) is officially offered a part-time, low-paying (\$1,500 for the whole basketball season) job coaching the basketball team at his old high school, an inner-city public school in [Richmond, California](#) for which he had previously played and set of as yet unbroken records. Although he discovers the players to be unruly and disrespectful, he accepts and starts to gain their respect.

Coach Carter sets strict new rules for the team in the form of contracts —

He forbids use of the word "Nigger" (lest it be used in moderation) and expects his players to address him as "Sir," they must maintain a 2.3 grade point average (not just the 2.0 GPA set by the CHSAA), they must attend classes and sit in the front row, and they must wear jackets and ties on game days (similar to the [NBA dress code](#)). One of the players, Timo Cruz, walks out of practice on the first day after an altercation with Carter. Two other team members, who were last season's scoring leaders, also walk out on the team,.

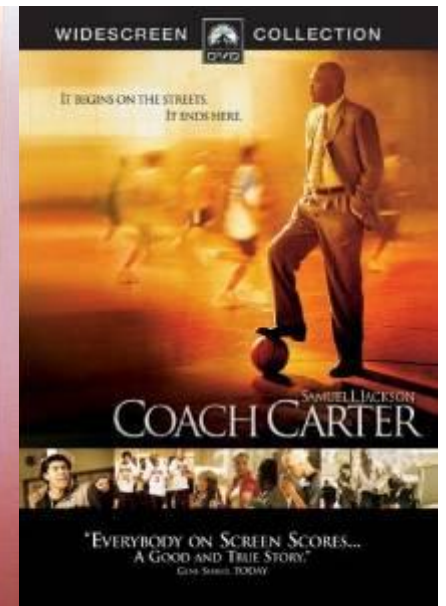
When we enter an organization, we are handed over 'set performance norms' just like the way Coach Carter did for his players. We are also supposed to meet these norms as part of our contract and if we do so, the organization and us, both benefit. Both sides need to keep their part of the contract for it to be successful.

Carter's son Damien, a good student who attended and played basketball at the private school St. Francis, quits the private school (against his father's wishes) and transfers to Richmond High School to play basketball on his father's team. Carter only agreed after Damien signed a contract stating that he will maintain a GPA of 3.7.

Senior role-holders also need to be perceived as being fair in treatment of all staff, without any special "rules" for some. This ensures commitment.

Cruz walks in on practice one day, asking to return. Carter challenges him with the seemingly impossible task of 1000 [suicides](#) and 2500 pushups to be completed in less than a week. Cruz comes close to the target but is unable to fully finish.

This article was published in Gray Matters Quarterly, Newsletter, Volume 1, Issue 3, March 2009



His teammates impress Carter by offering to do the rest of the suicides and pushups for Cruz, after which Carter allows Cruz back on the team. Together, Carter and the team, after a heavy course of working out win their first match only to be followed by multiple consecutive wins.

Real teamwork is all about mutual accountability. Team members of units in organizations must take collective ownership, if they are to make their units and organizations “win”.

Despite the team's winning record, Carter eventually realizes the players are becoming arrogant and that many of them are not living up to his academic requirements.

Carter solved the former problem by making fun of them in practice and eventually putting a rule that cocky behavior was prohibited.

Later, the team is invited to play in a tournament which they win in dramatic fashion over the home squad.

But after seeing the poor grades in the academic reports of the team, Carter cracks down on them and locks them out of the gym in the midst of the still undefeated season. He cancels basketball practice, forfeits games including the most important game of the season, and makes the team spend practice time in the library, being tutored by some of their teachers. Although a few of the players are fulfilling the contract Carter insists that all the players must accept the consequences for their collective actions as a team.

Herein comes the ‘core ideology’. Coach Carter, apart from basketball, wanted the players to get into good colleges so that they do not get into ‘bad company’ after school. So he wanted to instill in the players, discipline and sense of responsibility for duties that may not be attractive to them (studies).

Discipline plays a huge role in the development of an individual and it also affects the organization in the long run. Organizations often get elated by ‘quick wins’ without realizing that the ‘core’ of all these might not be right and hence the results are not sustainable in the long run.

We also often forget the ‘big picture’ in our enthusiasm of short term achievements. A good manager should never lose sight of the bigger goal and should always take corrective steps for that – even if that means loss in the short term. If the base is not strong, the building will eventually fall.

Eventually, the school board and the parents fight back against Carter's actions. The board eventually votes 4–2 to end the lockout, the dissenting votes being the school's principal and the chairwoman of the board. Carter is on the verge of quitting, but when he arrives at the gym to pack up his things, he finds the players sitting at school desks in the gym, with their teachers tutoring them. The players point out that even though the gym is reopened, the school board can't force them to play

The action of ‘sitting in the gym’ and studying shows that the boys have grown up. Often we operate in the ‘parent-to-child’ directive mode with our employees who are not mature. But over a period of time, when they understand the manager’s actions are ultimately beneficial to them, they become mature and take ‘profitable decisions’. Then the superior can resort to ‘adult-to-adult’ communication. This is transactional analysis. There is a Parent, Adult and Child in all of us. We switch our behaviours based on our perception of the others behaviour. In life also we follow the same principles, we talk to a child like a child, as a Parent. When the child grows up and learns to handle life on his own, we have adult-to-adult interactions.



Carter is heartened and decides to stay, thanking the players.

The team makes it into the state high-school championship playoffs. The big climactic game takes place at the state tournament's first round against the #1 ranked team in the state, St. Francis (starring a superstar NBA prospect). But in spite of close competition, Richmond loses.

The team is understandably disappointed by the loss, but Carter gives them an inspirational talk about all they've accomplished, quoting Richmond High School's pump-up cheer "Rich-what? Richmond!" and tells them that this loss won't ever take away what they've accomplished.

Organizations need to realize that it is not about business results and profitability only. Investment in people and ensuring their growth translates to commitment and corporate identity. It is the employees who become brand ambassadors if they develop into good professionals. Moreover, organizations also create a better society when their staff develop.

Over the closing song, it is told that six of the players went on to college (this was a school at which only about 50% of students graduated, and only 6% of those who graduate usually went to college). Junior Battle went to [San Jose State University](#) on a full scholarship. Jason Lyle went to [San Diego State University](#) and received a degree in Business Administration. Timo Cruz attended [Humboldt State University](#) where he became a starting guard. Jaron "Worm" Willis received a scholarship to [San Francisco State University](#) where he played point guard for four years. Kenyon Stone attended [Sacramento State University](#) and received a degree in Communications. Damien Carter went on to break the [Richmond High School](#) scoring and assist records previously held by his father. Upon graduation, he attended the [U.S. Military Academy](#) at West Point.

The movie "Coach Carter" also gives us a good understanding of concepts of Value Exchange and Performance Management and

What is Value Exchange?


It is the exchange of value between an employer and an employee.

What is the value we are exchanging?

The value being exchanged is at two levels, Employer – satisfying employee needs through appropriate investment, Employee – exhibiting profit maximising behaviour.

Why do we need to exchange? For the benefit of both the parties, employer and employee. This would meet the goals of both the entities.

At the **philosophical level**, Value Exchange: Is a belief about how organizations must continually (re) allocate resources to optimize the value of customer, employee, supplier and investor relationships. If implemented properly, Value Exchange will guide leadership decisions about investments in people, processes and technology that are necessary and sufficient to deliver predictably positive experiences for customers, employees, suppliers and investors in areas they value most.

At the **tactical level**, Value Exchange: Identifies the specific investments required to promote and sustain profit-producing customer, employee, and supplier **behaviours** at an individual level. Provides a causal model that enables organizations, over time, to drive down investment management decisions to employees who must be able to optimize shareholder value. Focuses on the simultaneous challenge of acquiring new customers, as well as improving their profitability and retention levels. Represents a dynamic and continuous way to improve business performance 

If you want to know more about the above topic or about our services, please do write to us at contact@graymatters.co.in