LEADING

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Learning from Life and My Years at Manchester United

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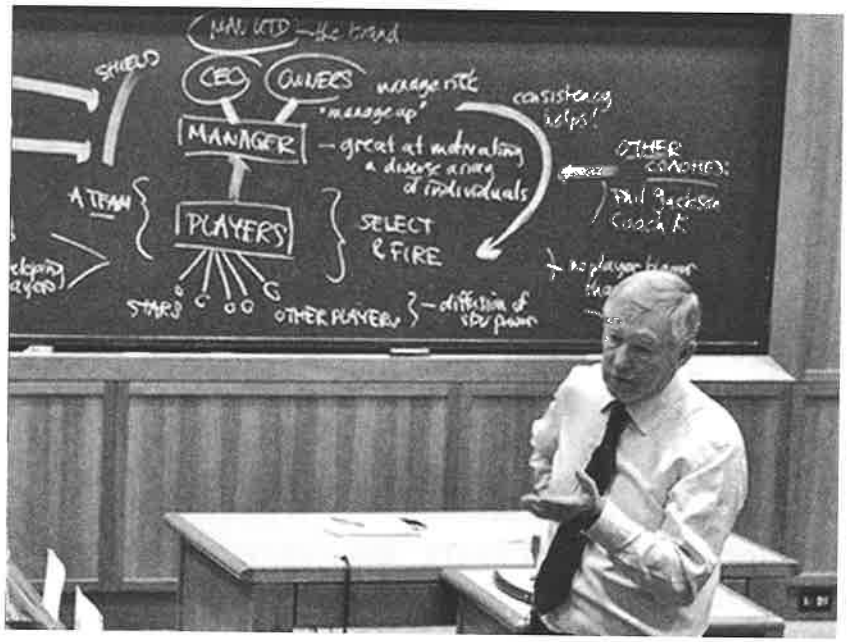

INTRODUCTION

When I left Govan High School in Glasgow at the age of 16 to begin my apprenticeship as a tool-maker at Remington Rand and start my life in football at Queen's Park, I could never have imagined that, 55 years later, I would be standing at the front of a lecture theatre at the Harvard Business School, talking to a class of MBA students about myself.

The first class I taught in October 2012 was jammed to the rafters. From my position in the pit at the front of the lecture hall, I could see the students waiting patiently in their tiered rows of seats – each with their own name card in front of them – and yet more crammed in the aisles. It was an intimidating scene, but also a tribute to the fascination exerted by Manchester United. Our club was in very good company, because among the organisations studied during the Strategic Marketing in Creative Industries course at the Business School are Burberry, the fashion retailer; Comcast, the giant American cable television operator; Marvel Enterprises, the Hollywood studio behind the *Spider-Man* and *Iron Man* comic and film franchises; and, of all things, the business activities of the music superstars Beyoncé and Lady Gaga.

When I looked at the students gathered in one of Aldrich Hall's lecture rooms, I was struck by their cosmopolitan nature,

age and intelligence. There were as many nationalities represented in the room as there are on the books of any Premier League squad. The students were all extremely well schooled, and would either work, or had already worked, for some of the most successful companies in the world. All were at the point where they could look forward to the best years of their lives. I could not help but think that the quieter ones, who seemed to be absorbing everything, were the people who would become the most successful.

I found myself on the campus of Harvard University in October of 2012 thanks to a collision of circumstances. A year or so previously I had received an approach from Anita Elberse, a professor at Harvard Business School. She had been curious about the way I managed United and the success that the club had enjoyed, and this resulted in a Harvard case study, *Sir Alex Ferguson: Managing Manchester United*, which was written following Anita spending a few days shadowing me at our training ground in the mornings and interviewing me in the afternoons. Around the same time, she invited me to come and speak to her class at their campus in Boston. I was intrigued, if a little daunted, and accepted the invitation.

Looking back, it's easy to see that this lecture marked the start of a transitional phase in my career. Although I didn't know it at the time, we were just a few weeks into what would turn out to be my final season in charge at Old Trafford, and there was a lot on my mind. We had lost the title in the previous season on goal difference to our local rivals, Manchester City, but were determined to bounce back. And we had started the new season strongly. Two days before I flew to Boston, we had come away from St James' Park with a 3–0 win over Newcastle United. It was our fifth victory in seven games and took us to second place in the Premier League, four points behind Chelsea.

We had also made a 100 per cent start to our Champions League campaign, UEFA's premier club competition, formerly known as the European Cup.

But for the time being, as I stood at the front of the classroom in Harvard, I put the Premier League and Champions League campaigns to one side and focused on sharing some of the secrets behind Manchester United's recent success.

The class began with Professor Elberse providing an overview of the different constituents I dealt with as manager of Manchester United – the players and the staff, the fans and the media, the board and our owners. I followed this by giving the students my thoughts on the principal elements of leadership. I then took questions from the students. This was the most enjoyable part of the day and it raised topics that I found myself thinking about in the days that followed. The students were all curious about how I became a leader, the individuals who had a major influence on my approach to life, the way I dealt with absurdly gifted and highly paid young men, the manner in which United maintained a thirst for excellence – and a raft of other topics. Understandably they also wanted to know about the daily habits of household names like Cristiano Ronaldo and David Beckham.

It took me a bit of time to adjust to standing in front of a blackboard rather than sitting in a football dugout, but I gradually began to realise that teaching bears some similarities to football management. Perhaps the most important element of each activity is to inspire a group of people to perform at their very best. The best teachers are the unsung heroes and heroines of any society, and in that classroom I could not help but think of Elizabeth Thomson, a teacher at Broomloan Road Primary School, who encouraged me to take my school work seriously and who helped me gain admission to Govan High School.

I have spent much of my life trying to coax the best out of young people and the Harvard classroom presented another such opportunity. As the years have gone by, I have found that my appetite for, and appreciation of, youthful enthusiasm has only grown. Young people will always manage to achieve the impossible – whether that is on the football field or inside a company or other big organisation. If I were running a company, I would always want to listen to the thoughts of its most talented youngsters, because they are the people most in touch with the realities of today and the prospects for tomorrow.

The books I have previously written about my addiction to football are full of details about competitions, games and the composition of teams that I played in and managed. The first, *A Light in the North: Seven Years with Aberdeen*, appeared in 1985, two years after Aberdeen's European Cup Winners' Cup victory. In 1999, after Manchester United won the Treble – the Premier League, the FA Cup and the UEFA Champions League – I published *Managing My Life*, and a few months after my retirement in 2013, *My Autobiography* was released.

This book is different. It's my attempt to sum up what I learned from my life in general and my time as a manager – first in Scotland for 12 years with East Stirlingshire, St Mirren and Aberdeen, and then, south of the border, for 26 years with Manchester United. I have also included some interesting data covering my time in management and some archival material that has not been seen before as a way to illustrate a few of the topics being addressed. The data and archive material can be found at the back of the book.

Figuring out what it takes to win trophies with a round ball differs from the challenges facing the leaders of companies like BP, Marks & Spencer, Vodafone, Toyota or Apple, or the people

who run large hospitals, universities or global charities. Yet there are traits that apply to all winners, and to organisations whose leaders aspire to win. This is my attempt to explain how I built, led and managed the organisation at Manchester United, and the sorts of things that worked for me. I don't pretend for a moment that they can be easily transplanted elsewhere, but I hope that readers will find some ideas or suggestions that can be emulated or modified for their own use.

I am not a management expert or business guru, and have little interest in pounding the lecture circuit repeating a canned pitch. So don't expect any academic jargon or formulaic prose. Don't ask me to explain double-entry book-keeping, how to hire 500 people in six months, the challenges of matrix management, the way to get a manufacturing line to churn out 100,000 smartphones a day, or the best approach to developing software. I don't have a clue. That expertise belongs to others because my whole life has revolved around football. This book contains the lessons and observations about how I pursued excellence on and off the football pitch.

Unlike the great American basketball coach John Wooden, whose 'Pyramid of Success' accompanied him throughout most of his career from 1928 to 1975, I never employed a one-page diagram or a massive guide that would be handed out to players at the start of each season and viewed as gospel. Nor did I favour minute instructions written on 3- x 5-inch cards, or copious notes compiled over the years. My approach to leadership and management evolved as the seasons went by. This is my attempt to sum up what I learned and distil it on paper.

This book came to life after I was approached by Michael Moritz, Chairman of Sequoia Capital, the US headquartered private investment firm best known for helping to shape and organise companies such as Apple, Cisco Systems, Google,

PayPal and YouTube and, more recently, WhatsApp and Airbnb. We had first talked about collaborating on a book several years before my retirement, but the timing was not right for either of us. Happily, in the past couple of years, we both had the time to devote our energy towards putting words on paper. It turned out that Michael, who led Sequoia Capital between the mid-1990s and 2012, had always wondered how Manchester United had maintained a high level of performance over several decades. As we talked, it was obvious that Michael's interest stemmed from his desire to ensure that Sequoia Capital did the same. As you might know, Sequoia Capital has been able to collect more than its fair share of silverware. Michael has contributed an epilogue to the book which, though it makes me blush from time to time, explains more fully why and how our paths came to cross.

Leading is the result of many conversations between Michael and me that cover a range of topics – some of which I hadn't pondered previously. The conversations allowed me to collect my thoughts about issues that confront any leader but which, because of the pressure of their daily obligations, I never had time to gather. I hope you find some of them useful.

Alex Ferguson
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BECOMING YOURSELF

Listening

How does someone become their true self? When I was young I never gave the topic much thought but, as a player and particularly as a manager, I became increasingly interested in the subject. If you are leading people, it helps to have a sense of who they are – the circumstances in which they were raised, the actions that will draw out the best in them, and the remarks that will cause them to be spooked. The only way to figure this out is by two underrated activities: listening and watching.

Most people don't use their eyes and ears effectively. They aren't very observant and they fail to listen intently. As a result, they miss half of what is going on around them. I can think of some managers who could talk under water. I don't think it helps them. There's a reason that God gave us two ears, two eyes and one mouth. It's so you can listen and watch twice as much as you talk. Best of all, listening costs you nothing.

Two of the best listeners I have met were television interviewers. Before his death in 2013, David Frost had spent nearly five decades interviewing people, including, most famously, the former US president Richard Nixon. I first met Frost in 2005

when we were both investors in a property fund manager. A few years later, after he'd left the BBC, he interviewed me for Sky Sports.

Unlike most television interviewers, David did not feel the need to prove he was smarter than his guest. He did not keep snapping at their heels, or interrupting, but he was definitely no pushover – as he demonstrated with the 28 hours and 45 minutes of conversations he taped with Richard Nixon in 1977. Some of this was because of the format of his shows. He was not doing post-match, 90-second interviews with a producer yelling into his earpiece demanding a sound-bite. And he wasn't swivelling his head, mid-interview, as he tried to catch the eye of his next unsuspecting target. David would look you in the eyes, lock out the rest of the world and demonstrate great interest. He had time on his side – 30 or 60 minutes (an eternity in today's world of instant messaging and Twitter) to gradually make his guest feel at ease. David's greatest gift was his ability to get a guest to relax, and that always seemed to allow him to extract more from an interview. It's little wonder that his nickname was 'The Grand Inquisitor'.

Charlie Rose, the American television interviewer, is similar. I don't know Charlie as well as I knew David, but a couple of years ago I was invited to appear on his show. I was a little apprehensive about appearing on American television, which isn't as familiar to me as all the British talk shows. The day before I went on Charlie's show, he invited me for a drink at Harry Cipriani, an Italian restaurant on Fifth Avenue in New York. Charlie is a big man and has hands the size of dinner plates, so I wondered whether he was going to clamp me in a vice. His opening line was, 'You know I'm half Scottish', and after that, I knew all would be well. Charlie had cleverly put me at my ease and given us something familiar to talk about.

On the following day the taping went fine, with Charlie listening just as intently as David, even though I suspect his producer was wondering about whether she would have to use subtitles to make my Scottish accent comprehensible to viewers in Mississippi and Kansas.

I have never been a television host but I've always valued listening. This doesn't mean I was in the habit of phoning people to ask them what I should do in a particular situation. On the whole I liked to work things out for myself. But I do remember seeking help when, in 1984, I was offered the manager's position at Glasgow Rangers by John Paton, who was one of the club's largest shareholders. It was the second time that there had been overtures from Rangers, so I called Scot Symon, who had managed the club for 13 years, and sought his advice. I already had my doubts about going to Rangers. If I was going to leave Aberdeen I was unsure about going to another Scottish club. When Scot discovered that I had not talked to the ultimate authority at Rangers, vice-chairman Willie Waddell, he urged me to decline the offer, since he felt it was more of a fishing expedition and probably hadn't been officially sanctioned by the board. I did, and I've never regretted that decision.

Many people cannot stop long enough to listen – especially when they become successful and all the people around them are being obsequious and pretending to hang on their every word. They launch into monologues as if suddenly they know everything. Putting these megalomaniacs to one side, it always pays to listen to others. It's like enrolling in a continuous, lifelong free education, with the added benefit that there are no examinations and you can always discard useless comments. A few examples come to mind:

Years ago somebody gave me a set of tapes containing conversations with Bill Shankly, the Liverpool manager between 1959

and 1974. They were reminiscences, and were not designed for broadcast, but I listened to them several times while driving. They contained all sorts of anecdotes, but the inescapable truth of those tapes was the degree of Shankly's complete obsession with football, which must have been in his bone marrow. Even if Shankly verged on the extreme, it reinforced to me the dedication required to succeed.

On another occasion, after a game against Leeds United in 1992, I was in the team bath with the players – which was highly unusual for me – listening to their analysis of the match. Steve Bruce and Gary Pallister were raving about Eric Cantona, the French striker Leeds had signed from Nîmes. Steve Bruce, who was then United's captain, was particularly complimentary about Cantona's abilities. Somehow, those comments planted a seed, which soon afterwards led to us buying Cantona.

Even as we signed Eric Cantona, I sought advice from people I trusted. I chatted with both Gérard Houllier, the French manager, and the French sports journalist, Erik Bielderman, in an attempt to better understand the player I was buying. I also spoke to Michel Platini who said, 'You should sign him, his character is underestimated, he just needs a bit of understanding.' They all provided tips about the best way to handle Eric, who arrived at United with a reputation – which was unfair – for being unmanageable. It proved to be a pivotal decision for United that season – arguably for the whole decade. In the six games we played before Eric arrived we had scored four goals. In the six games following his arrival, we scored 14.

The comment that led us to Cantona was unusual but I made it a practice to listen intently to how the players would predict the probable line-up of our opponents. It was always a guessing game until we got handed the team-sheet and our

opponents' line-up could have a big influence on our tactics. During the week before a game, players often talk to their pals around the League, particularly their former team-mates, so they sometimes pick up clues about which players they would be facing in the tunnel. We used to have little competitions to see whether we could guess the line-up. No matter how hard I listened, I could never fully anticipate the 11 characters we would be up against. As the squads expanded, it became even harder to do. Inevitably, after we eventually had the information, the line-up would differ from what I had expected and the players would rib me by saying, 'You're right again, Boss.'

After United got beaten at Norwich in November 2012, out of courtesy I had to show my face in their manager's room. Chris Hughton was gracious enough, but the room was packed with people celebrating their win. I did not want to show any weakness, so I put on a good face and listened to what they had to say – particularly about the players they were singling out for praise. I just remembered all their names and made a mental note to put everyone on our radar screen.

Looking back further, I remember another critical piece of advice. In 1983, when Aberdeen – the team I managed between 1978 and 1986 – were due to play Real Madrid in the final of the European Cup Winners' Cup in Gothenburg, I invited Jock Stein to accompany us. Jock was one of my heroes and was the first British manager to win the European Cup in 1967, when Celtic beat Inter Milan. Jock said two things that I have never forgotten. First, he told me, 'Make sure you are the second team on the ground for training on the day before the game because then your opponents will think you are watching them while they work.' He also advised me to take along a bottle of Macallan whisky for Real Madrid's manager, the great Alfredo

Di Stéfano. When I gave Di Stéfano that bottle, he was really taken aback. It made him think that we were in awe of him – that he was the big guy and that little Aberdeen felt they were beaten already. I'm glad I listened to Jock because both his tips helped.

Later, when I worked for Jock as assistant manager of Scotland, I used to pepper him with questions about tactics and dealing with management issues. He was as close to a managerial mentor as I ever had, and I would soak up almost everything he had to say. Jock used to advise me never to lose my temper with players straight after the game. He kept saying, 'Wait till Monday, when things have calmed down.' It was sound advice; it just didn't happen to suit my style. Nonetheless, it is no coincidence that in my office in Wilmslow the largest photograph on the wall is of Jock Stein and me, before the Wales v Scotland game on 10 September 1985 – the night he died.

There is one final example that comes to mind: Jimmy Sirrel, who was manager of Notts County and an instructor on a coaching course I attended in 1973 at Lilleshall, one of the United Kingdom's National Sports Centres, taught me a crucial lesson. He told me never to let all the players' contracts expire around the same time because it allows them to collude against the manager and the club. I'd never thought about that before Jimmy mentioned it to me but, afterwards, I paid very close attention to making sure we staggered the contracts. I bet Jimmy's advice took him less than a minute to convey, but the benefit of listening to him lasted me a lifetime. It just shows that advice often comes when you least expect it, and listening, which costs nothing, is one of the most valuable things you can do.

Watching

Watching is the other underrated activity, and again, it costs nothing. For me there are two forms of observation: the first is on the detail and the second is on the big picture. Until I was managing Aberdeen and hired Archie Knox as my assistant manager, I had not appreciated the difference between watching for the tiny particulars while also trying to understand the broader landscape. Shortly after he arrived at Aberdeen, Archie sat me down and asked me why I had hired him. The question perplexed me, until he explained that he had nothing to do since I insisted on doing everything. He was very insistent, and was egged on by Teddy Scott, Aberdeen's general factotum, who agreed with him. Archie told me that I shouldn't be conducting the training sessions but, instead, should be on the sidelines watching and supervising. I wasn't sure that I should follow this advice because I thought it would hamper my control of the sessions. But when I told Archie I wanted to mull over his advice, he was insistent. So, somewhat reluctantly, I bowed to his wishes and, though it took me a bit of time to understand you can see a lot more when you are not in the thick of things, it was the most important decision I ever made about the way I managed and led. When you are a step removed from the fray, you see things that come as surprises – and it is important to allow yourself to be surprised. If you are in the middle of a training session with a whistle in your mouth, your entire focus is on the ball. When I stepped back and watched from the sidelines, my field of view was widened and I could absorb the whole session, as well as pick up on players' moods, energy and habits. This was one of the most valuable lessons of my career

and I'm glad that I received it more than 30 years ago. Archie's observation was the making of me.

As a player I had tried to do both – paying attention to the ball at my feet whilst being aware of what was happening elsewhere on the field. But until Archie gave me a finger wagging, I had not really understood that, as a manager, I was in danger of losing myself to the details. It only took me a handful of days to understand the merit of Archie's point, and from that moment I was always in a position to be able to zoom in to see the detail and zoom out to see the whole picture.

As a manager you are always watching out for particular things. You might be monitoring a player in training to see if he has shaken off a thigh injury; appraising a promising 12 year old in the youth academy; looking at a hot prospect in a night game at some stadium in Germany; examining the demeanour of a player or coach at the lunch table. You could also be searching for patterns and clues in a video analysis reel, the body language during a negotiation, or the length of the grass on a pitch. Then, on Saturday afternoons or Wednesday evenings, there would be the need for the other, wider lens – the one capable of taking in the whole picture.

It sounds simple to say you should believe what your eyes tell you, but it is very hard to do. It is astonishing how many biases and preconceived notions we carry around, and these influence what we see, or, more precisely, what we think we see. If I was told by a scout that a player had a good left foot, it would be hard for me to forget that observation when I went to watch him in action – and in doing so it would be easy to overlook another quality or, much more painfully, ignore a major fault. I was certainly interested in what other people had to say, but I always wanted to watch with my own eyes without having my judgement swayed by the filters of others.

Here is one observation from which I benefited for decades. In 1969 West Germany were training at Rugby Park in Kilmarnock and I asked Karl-Heinz Heddergot, of the German FA, for permission to watch the practice. The only people in the ground were the German players and staff, a few groundsmen, and me. I watched the training for around an hour and a half. The German squad played without goalkeepers, and just concentrated on possession of the ball, which was unusual during a period when coaches used to emphasise training sessions composed of long-distance running. That one encounter made an enormous impression on me, and thereafter I started to emphasise the importance of possession. As soon as I became a coach at St Mirren, I started doing 'boxes' – where we'd pit four players against two in a confined amount of space. We started with boxes that were 25 yards by 25 yards, which forced the players to perform in a confined space and improve their ball skills. As players' skills improved, we tightened the boxes. It helped with everything: awareness, angles, touch on the ball, and eventually it led to being able to play one-touch football. It was a coaching technique I used right up until my last training session at United on 18 May 2013. Watching that practice for 90 minutes in Kilmarnock back in 1969 furnished me with a lesson I used for half a century.

Observation – sizing up others and measuring situations – is an essential part of preparation, and, at United, we made it a habit to carefully watch opponents before going up against them in big games. This was even more important in the era prior to sophisticated video analysis, when the best we could do was fast forward or rewind through a videotape. One example of this paying off was in United's 1991 European Cup Winners' Cup final against Barcelona. It was the first European final to be played by an English team following the ban from European competition

after the Heysel disaster of 1985. I had attended Barcelona's semi-final first leg against Juventus with Steve Archibald, a former Aberdeen player, during which their main striker, Hristo Stoichkov, was hugely impressive and scored two goals. In the second leg in Turin he suffered a hamstring injury that ruled him out of the final. It played havoc with their normal formation. During the final they relied on Michael Laudrup to be their chief offensive weapon, driving forward from midfield which, thanks to watching Barcelona previously, we had anticipated. We had already adjusted our tactics, steadfastly refused to be lured too far forward by Laudrup, and eventually won 2–1.

There were also plenty of times when I saw a player out of the corner of my eye who came as a complete, but pleasant, surprise. In 2003 I had gone to watch a young Petr Čech play in France. Didier Drogba, whom I had not heard of, was playing in the same game. He was a dynamo – a strong, explosive striker with a true instinct for goal – though he ultimately slipped through our fingers. That didn't happen with Ji-sung Park. I had gone to get the measure of Lyon's Michael Essien in the Champions League in 2005 during their quarter-final ties with PSV Eindhoven, and saw this ceaseless bundle of energy buzz about the field like a cocker spaniel. It was Ji-sung Park. The following week I sent my brother, Martin, who was a scout for United, to watch him, to see what his eyes told him. They told him the same thing and we signed him. Ji-sung was one of those rare players who could always create space for himself.

These were very special moments. I always enjoyed stumbling across a new talent when I was least expecting it. Very rarely do you see something so astonishing that you sense it arrived from another world (though Eric Cantona, at his very best, could have done so). These moments – and players – are the reward for a lifetime of careful watching. None of them suddenly

dropped into our lap; they were the result of keeping our radar operating 24 hours a day.

Reading

I have picked up a lot from reading books over the years. As a boy I disappointed my parents by not working hard enough at school (largely because I was already besotted by football), so my formal education ended when I was 16. But I've always liked reading. In fact I was in the library in Glasgow on 6 February 1958 when I heard about the Munich air disaster. I've subscribed for many years to the *Daily Express* during the week and the Scottish *Sunday Mail* and *Sunday Post*, the *Sunday Express* and *Independent* on the weekends. I've also been partial to the *Racing Post*, which keeps me up to date on horse racing. But, more importantly, I've always liked books.

My interest in books stretches far beyond football. One of the coaches I read about came from a sport about which I know nothing. He was the great UCLA basketball coach John Wooden, who led his team to ten national championship titles in 12 seasons. He was probably stronger as an inspirational coach than as a master of tactics, but there was no misunderstanding about who was boss. He would not tolerate any waywardness or people straying from the path he mapped out. I also read up on Vince Lombardi, who was a household name in the United States during the time he was the coach of the Green Bay Packers. He was as obsessed about American football as I was about English football. I found him easy to identify with and love his quote, 'We didn't lose the game; we just ran out of time.'

I have dipped into other books about management and leadership but, maybe because I was always so preoccupied with my

own job, I never found one that spoke to me. The same goes for sports books and players' biographies. For the most part, a United player's autobiography was an account, albeit from a different angle, of something I had already lived through. I just found I preferred reading books that had little to do with my daily work. From time to time I tripped across other football books such as David Peace's novel, *The Damned Utd*, a fictionalised account of Brian Clough's 44-day spell as manager of Leeds United in 1974, but cannot say I found it captivating. However, I was taken by *Farewell but not Goodbye*, the autobiography of Bobby Robson, a man whom I admired greatly, who started his life down a coal-mine and who, after being fired as England manager after being one step short of the 1990 World Cup final, showed great courage by picking himself up and going to the Netherlands to manage PSV Eindhoven before later heading to Porto and Barcelona and, eventually returning to his hometown, Newcastle. Of the players' autobiographies, the one I would single out is Gary Neville's *Red*, which was published in 2011. It's a thoughtful book and helps the reader understand the pressure on players and their need to succeed.

I don't want to overplay this, but I found some observations in books about military history relevant to football. Every general has to learn the best time to attack and when it is better to be conservative. Oddly, this was reiterated by a training course I attended with the SAS, who explained how they mounted attacks by outflanking and diverting the enemy on either side and then launching a deadly assault down the middle. One year we took the whole United squad to the SAS training grounds in Herefordshire for a couple of days during a break in the season. They gave us a taste of everything – winching descents from helicopters, the shooting range, and simulated break-ups of hostage situations. The players loved it. One lesson I took from the SAS was the effectiveness of a battle formation, where troops

attacking on the flanks create softness in the central defences. I took that lesson right to the training pitch where we worked on it for a week before a Liverpool game. I had players attacking the back post and the front post and then Gary Pallister came from right outside the centre of the box to score. In fact Pallister scored twice using precisely the same ploy. It could have been a re-enactment of a battle plan – except none of the TV commentators picked up on that.

I've always been interested in American history – both military and political – and I've read a fair amount about Abraham Lincoln and JFK, especially the value of taking your time before making decisions. I found Doris Kearns Goodwin's book *Team of Rivals: the Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* absorbing, while JFK's careful approach during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 is as fine an example of deliberate decision-making as you will find. I certainly found more virtue in patiently working towards the right decision as I got older. In my early days as a manager I could be impetuous – always in a hurry to get things done and stamp my authority on a situation. It takes courage to say, 'Let me think about it.' When you're young you want to fly to the moon and you want to get there quickly. I think it's usually enthusiasm that causes this. As you get older you temper your enthusiasm with experience.

I realise that we're shaped by lots of other forces beyond just watching, listening and reading. We're all accidental victims of our parents' DNA; we are shaped by the luck of the draw, the circumstances in which we grew up and the education we received. But we all have two sets of very powerful tools that we completely control: our eyes and our ears. Watching others, listening to their advice and reading about people are three of the best things I ever did.

2

RECOGNISING HUNGER

Discipline

Discipline was drummed into me from an early age. My father was a real disciplinarian. He worked in shipbuilding, which was a hard and cruel business. He didn't talk much. He could be stubborn and was a man of few words but he was very intelligent. He was self-educated, left school at 14, but read all the time. He wanted my brother and me to be trained in a craft and refused to let me become a professional footballer until after I had finished my apprenticeship as a tool-maker. He drummed discipline into us from an early age. On schooldays he would always shake my leg promptly at 6 a.m. He would also be out of the house at 6.45 a.m. on the dot because he liked to be at the yard when the gates opened. Maybe that's why, a couple of decades later as a manager, I got into the habit of appearing for work before the milkman arrived. After I started being paid for playing football, I used to go out on Saturday nights. My father didn't like that. He thought I was living life too well. I went about six months without talking to him. The two of us were too alike.

When I was 14 I started playing for Drumchapel Amateurs, which was the biggest amateur team in Scotland. It was run by Douglas Smith, a relatively wealthy man whose family owned a shipbreaking yard. He had an arrangement with Reid's Tea Rooms in the centre of Glasgow so that boys could get a free lunch. He ran five teams – Under-18s, Under-17s, Under-16s, Under-15s and Under-14s. Every weekend he would take us down to his estate in Dunbartonshire, just outside Glasgow, walk us through his piggery and then make us play five-a-side games on his bowling green. He tensed up when one of his teams lost and would start sweating and get visibly angry. He had a great sense of discipline and a deep desire to win.

Discipline had been an issue from day one at St Mirren, which I managed between 1974 and 1978. When I first arrived, the local paper, the *Paisley Daily Express,* sent a photographer out to take a picture of the team with their new manager. The next morning I saw the photograph in the paper with Ian Reid, the player who had been the team captain, standing behind me with his fingers making a set of rabbit ears. After we lost our first game to Cowdenbeath, I called Reid into my office on the Monday morning. He said that his rabbit ears were only a joke and I told him, 'It's not the kind of joke I like.' John Mowat was a good, young player who started answering back when I gave him instructions during a game. I put both Reid and Mowat in my black book. There was another player who told me that he couldn't attend a training session because he and his girlfriend had tickets for a pop concert. I asked him whether the concerts were on every night of the year. When he said that wasn't the case, I told him, 'If you want to go to the concert, fine, but don't come back.' I just wanted to make it very clear to all the players

that I did not want to be messed about with. They got the message.

When I became a manager, one of my duties was to instil discipline. At St Mirren, the team was composed of part-time players but, nonetheless, we all travelled on the same bus to away games. One player decided to drive himself to East Fife one Saturday. I tore into him in the dressing room before the game for being too big for his boots and I told him he wouldn't be part of the team that day. Then I realised I didn't have a spare player to replace him with, so that piece of discipline went out the window.

When I got to Aberdeen, which is a more sedate place than Glasgow, I realised that I would need to inject a bit of Glaswegian ferocity and discipline into the team. I didn't spare the horses. I was aggressive and demanding and I suspect not everyone enjoyed it, but it made the players into men and increased their profiles.

At Aberdeen there were three players who, in my opinion, were a nuisance. They just did not take training seriously enough. So I would make them work out again each afternoon, dumped them into the reserve team and sent them to play in freezing places like Peterhead on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. Eventually, I just got rid of them all.

Discipline might also have been instilled, decades ago, by the fact that teams rarely seemed to change. It's hard to believe (especially when you see the seven substitutes sitting on the bench during Premier League games) that substitutes were only first allowed in the mid-1960s. When I was a boy a team barely changed for the entire season, and even now I can name the Raith Rovers team from the early 1950s. There was also a large element of economic necessity about staying in the team to ensure you got your bonus money.

From time to time, in my younger days, I was too much of a disciplinarian and did things that I regretted. For example, after Aberdeen returned home from Sweden with the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1983, we had a parade which ended at our stadium, Pittodrie, which was packed to the gills. All the fans wanted to see the players carry the trophy around the field and Mark McGhee, Aberdeen's centre-forward, was eager to show them the trophy. However, I thought he had been celebrating too much and so I tore into him and forbade him from carrying the trophy. Then his mother arrived in the dressing room and, of course, that made me feel rotten. So the next morning I phoned McGhee and apologised and asked him to accompany me down to the harbour where he and I showed the trophy to the fans who had travelled by boat back from Gothenburg. I was not eager to repeat incidents like that.

The issue of discipline accompanied me throughout my career. In the conversations I had with Martin Edwards before accepting Manchester United's offer to join them in November 1986, he alluded to the habit of some of the players to drink too much. He mentioned that one of the reasons United had been interested in me was that I had built a reputation as a manager who was known for maintaining discipline and not tolerating poor behaviour.

When I got to United there was a lax attitude towards lots of things, including the clothes the players wore when travelling to games. They used to wear the tracksuits of whatever clothing company was sponsoring them – Reebok, Puma, adidas. It was a royal mess. I immediately insisted that they travel in flannels, the club blazer and tie. When Fabien Barthez joined us in 2000 as a goalkeeper from Monaco, he had to adjust to our clothing regimen. He did

this by changing clothes on the bus on the way to games. After the game he would return his jacket, trousers, shirt and tie to Albert Morgan, our kit man, who would take care of them until Fabien was required to again appear as a representative of our club. Eric Cantona breached the dress code on one occasion when there was a big civic reception in the town hall for the team and he appeared wearing a suede jacket which had long fringes and a picture of an American Indian chief on the back. The next day he swore to me – and I believed him – that he had thought it was going to be a casual occasion, which is how it would have been treated in France.

Players give a manager plenty of opportunities to crack the whip, so it's best to pick and choose the moments. You don't have to mete out punishment very often for everyone to get the message. For example, I never thought it useful to fine players if they were late for training. Around Manchester, especially in the winter, the roads quickly get clogged if there is an accident or maintenance works. Players would sometimes get stuck in traffic jams and arrive late. If it happened once or twice I didn't care. However, if someone was a repeated late offender, I'd suggest to him that he leave his house ten minutes earlier and would point out to him that, by being late, he was letting his team-mates down. No team player wants to do that. I only remember fining one player for tardy appearances at the training ground and that was the goalkeeper, Mark Bosnich, who was repeatedly late.

I wasn't afraid of crossing into what some of the players might have considered their private territory – hairstyles and jewellery. I never understood why players would want to have long hair when they spend so much effort trying to be as fit and quick as possible. Anything, even a few extra locks of

hair, just didn't seem sensible. I had my first issue with a player on this topic when Karel Poborský came to Manchester from Slavia Prague in 1996, looking as though he was going to play for Led Zeppelin rather than United. I did manage to persuade him to trim his locks but, even so, they were always too long for my taste. There were other players who would be wearing necklaces carrying crosses that seemed heavier than those the pilgrims carry up the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem. I banned all those. However, there wasn't much I could do about tattoos since it was hard – even for me – to argue that they added any weight. Eric Cantona started that particular craze when he arrived one morning with the head of an American Indian chief stencilled on to his left breast. Since Eric was venerated by his team-mates, several other players followed suit. I was always struck by the fact that Cristiano Ronaldo never chose to deface his body. It said a lot about his self-discipline.

Leaders can also hand down different sentences. Inexperienced, or insecure, leaders are often tempted to make any infraction a capital offence. That is all well and good except, once you have hung the person, you are plumb out of options. I gradually began to understand the wisdom behind the phrase, 'Let the punishment fit the crime' and, as judge, jury and chief executioner, I had plenty of sentences at my disposal. A simple yet deadly one was silence, and I used it often. It did not require any public humiliation or tongue-lashing, yet because everyone likes to be acknowledged, the recipient of my silent treatment knew that he was in the woodshed. I doled out lots of fines to players as a way to rap their knuckles and try to keep them focused on the team. They would usually be handed out after bookings or red cards received for stupid behaviour, like dissent shown towards the

referee or a wild tackle or unsuitable behaviour off the pitch. These numbers grew more consequential in absolute size as pay ballooned in the Premier League, but the nature of the fine – a week's or two weeks' wages – remained constant. After a disastrous Christmas party in 2007, I fined the first and the reserve team a week's wages.

For the youngsters who were hoping to make the squad, I could set their heads spinning by just refusing to let them travel with the first team. For the squad members there were a couple of other ways I used to drive home the price of infractions. One was to leave a player out of the side, but the more severe was to make him sit in the stands dressed in his civvies. That is a footballer's equivalent of a public hanging. Nobody was immune from this.

Finally, there were the severest penalties of all – a suspension and a transfer. You might think that the second was the toughest, but that was not the way I looked at it. Once we had decided a player was going to be transferred, it was because he either no longer fitted into what we needed at United or, in a few cases, like Cristiano Ronaldo, we were honouring promises. From my point of view, the suspension was by far the most painful because the penalty was borne by both the player *and* the club. That happened in January 1995 when Eric Cantona was suspended for the final four months of the season by United and a further four months by the FA.

Every player dislikes being omitted from the first team, and that sense of disappointment only grows as players age and start to come to grips with the fact that their best playing days are behind them. However, I never let sentiment interfere with my team selections and that was particularly true for big games. In 1994 I dropped Bryan Robson from the squad for the FA Cup

final. Bryan was at the end of his distinguished 13-year stay at United and I had underestimated how important it was to him to have a crack at winning his fourth FA Cup medal. In retrospect, I would have kept him in the squad and perhaps played him for the last part of the game

Even though, as my players knew too well, I had a tendency to explode, my temper usually did not have a destructive effect. That was not the case for players who abandoned their self-control and self-discipline on the field. If they got a string of yellow cards or, worse still, a red card as a result of some rush of blood to the head, it could have bitter consequences for the team. Not only did we have to play with ten men but we also lost the services of the player while he was suspended. Peter Schmeichel, Paul Ince, Bryan Robson, Roy Keane, Mark Hughes and Eric Cantona could all start a fight in an empty house. That did not help our cause one bit, and I made no secret about my displeasure when they got sent off for committing some act of folly.

There are some people who just seem to be immune to discipline. Juan Sebastián Verón, the Argentinian midfielder, was like that. Try as I might, I could not get him to fit into our system. He was a fantastic player with tremendous ability, but he was just a wild card. If I played him centre midfield he would end up wide right. If I played him wide right, he would wind up wide left. He simply did not have the necessary self-discipline and so we traded him after two years and 82 appearances. You cannot build a team with blithe free spirits.

There are also some players who will follow instructions to the letter. Ji-sung Park, our South Korean midfielder, was one of those. If I gave him an instruction he was like a dog with a bone – he just would not let go. When we played AC Milan

in the Champions League in 2010, I asked Ji-sung Park to mark Andrea Pirlo, their midfielder and creative force. Pirlo was used to running the show for Milan but Ji-sung effectively suffocated him.

I placed discipline above all else and it might have cost us several titles. If I had to repeat things, I'd do precisely the same, because once you bid farewell to discipline you say goodbye to success and set the stage for anarchy. Shortly after Christmas in 2011, I discovered that three United players had gone out on the town on Boxing Day and were the worse for wear when they showed up for training the following morning. So I ordered all of them to do extra training, and dropped the three of them from the team we fielded for the following game against Blackburn Rovers. We already had a large number of injuries, and although this decision weakened us further, I felt this was the correct thing to do. We lost the game to Blackburn 3–2, which cost us a precious three points, and eventually we lost the League to Manchester City on goal difference. Many years earlier, in 1995, our decision to suspend Eric Cantona for the remainder of the season, following his fight with a fan after he got sent off at Crystal Palace, cost us both the League and FA Cup. At the time we suspended Eric (a suspension that, subsequently, was made even more severe by the FA) we were just a point off the top of the table and, had he played for the remainder of the season, I am positive we would have won by about ten points, instead of being pipped at the post by one point by Blackburn Rovers. In the long run principles are just more important than expediency.

If you can assemble a team of 11 talented players who concentrate intently during training sessions, take care of their diet and bodies, get enough sleep and show up on time,

then you are almost halfway to winning a trophy. It is always astonishing how many clubs are incapable of doing this.

Before we beat Liverpool 1–0 in the 1996 FA Cup final, I sensed we would win the game by the way our opponents appeared for their pre-match inspection of the pitch. The entire Liverpool team, with the exception of the manager and his assistant, appeared in white suits supplied by a fashion designer. For me it signalled a breakdown in discipline and showed that the team was distracted by a frivolous sideshow. I mentioned this to my kit manager, Norman Davies, and the forecast proved correct when Eric Cantona scored a few minutes from the final whistle. A different example occurred years earlier when in September 1985 Aberdeen beat Rangers 3–0 at Ibrox Park after two of our opponents got sent off during the first half. Rangers had just tried to bully us and, with the crowd going nuts, lost control of their senses. It was complete pandemonium and we had to scuttle to the dressing room for safety for a period during the second half while the police cleared the pitch of marauding fans. This was one of those classic cases where our opponents destroyed themselves.

I always felt that our triumphs were an expression of the consistent application of discipline. It may surprise some to learn that much of the success comes from not getting carried away or trying to do the impossible and taking too many risks. I had a habit of sitting down in January and looking at the fixtures for the remainder of the season for both United and our principal opponents, and would tot up the points that I thought each club would obtain. I was never too far off and the exercise helped illuminate how important it was to grind out the unglamorous 1–0 results. During these sorts of games, we would concentrate on maintaining a compact midfield and yielding nothing. One particular game sticks in my mind: in

March 2007 we went to Middlesbrough during a three-month period when we had the Swedish striker, Henrik Larsson, on loan from Helsingborgs. I could not have asked more from him when, under real pressure, he abandoned his attacking position and fell back into midfield just to help dig out the result. When Henrik appeared in the dressing room at the end of the game, all the players and staff stood up and spontaneously broke into applause for the immense effort he had made in his unaccustomed role. At the end of the season we requested an extra Premier League winners' medal for Henrik, even though he had not played the ten games that at the time were required to obtain the award.

Work Rate

My parents always worked. My father worked in the Glasgow shipyards while my mother first worked in a wire factory and then in one that made parts for aeroplanes. My father often worked 60 hours a week and his was a tough, cold, dangerous existence. Glasgow is at about the same latitude as Moscow, so when the winter winds swept up the Clyde, the shipyards were brutal places. He would usually take two weeks off a year. In 1955 he worked 64 hours a week for pay of £7 and 15 shillings, or about £189 in today's money. After he died from cancer in 1979, my mother cleaned houses. My parents' devotion to work was probably accentuated by the fact that there wasn't much of a social safety net. Safety standards were appalling, health benefits were negligible, and the industry of lawyers who specialise in making ridiculous claims for the thinnest of reasons didn't exist. I never knew a time when my parents were not working. For a holiday in the summer we used to take a bus

to Saltcoats, where all my brother and I did was play football or draughts or chess.

Since both my parents worked their fingers to the bone, I somehow just absorbed the idea that the only way I was going to improve my life was to work very hard. It was baked into my marrow. I was incapable of coasting and I have always been irritated by people who frittered away natural talents because they were not prepared to put in the hours. There's a lot of satisfaction that comes from knowing you're doing your best, and there's even more that comes when it begins to pay off. I suppose that explains why I played in games on the day that I got married and on the day my first son was born. I only missed three United games out of 1,500 – the first to be in Glasgow with my brother following the death of his wife in 1998, then because of my eldest son's wedding in South Africa in 2000 and finally to scout David de Gea in 2010.

At St Mirren and Aberdeen I used to watch as many games a week as possible. I usually did this with Archie Knox, who was Aberdeen's assistant manager. Archie's parents were farmers and he grew up on a farm outside Dundee. So he had always worked farmers' hours and shared my sort of work ethic. The two of us would travel to the games together and, if we were going to Glasgow, Archie would drive down there and I would sleep, and on the way back I'd do the driving and Archie would be snoring away. The round trip could take six hours. Whenever we got tempted to skip a game and take the night off, we'd always say to each other, 'If we miss one game in Glasgow, we'll miss two.'

In most football clubs, managers work much harder than people imagine. Within the Premier League there is unrelenting pressure, and outside the Premier League there isn't enough money around for managers to employ big staffs. That was

certainly true when I was starting out. At St Mirren I had a staff of four, which included the assistant manager, a reserve team coach, the physio and a part-time kit manager. At Aberdeen Teddy Scott was the kit man, coach of the reserves and general oiler of any squeaky wheels. He also did all the laundry and ironed the kits. Occasionally he'd sleep on the snooker table because he'd missed the last bus. Even at United, when I started, we only had a staff of eight.

A few times at Aberdeen the entire staff, the apprentices and even the chairman would be up at six o'clock in the morning to go and clear snow from the ground. In March 1980 we started our run towards my first League championship on a day when we had cleared seven or eight inches of snow off the field. We beat Morton 1–0. It was the only game played that day in Scotland.

All the top managers, Carlo Ancelotti, José Mourinho and Arsène Wenger have a formidable work ethic. But it is the unsung heroes who I always admired the most – the sort of managers who would never give up, even though life and luck had not given them one of the top teams. In Scotland I used to run into Alex Smith and Jim McLean in all sorts of godforsaken places, on nights when the rain was hammering down and it would have been much nicer to be sitting in front of the television. Alex managed clubs north of the border for almost 40 years, and Jim was the manager of Dundee United for 22 seasons. Lennie Lawrence and John Rudge are two men whose names most people outside football probably don't even know but Lennie is one of the few people who has managed over 1,000 games for clubs like Charlton Athletic, Bradford City, Luton Town and Grimsby Town, while John managed Port Vale for 16 seasons before spending another 14 years or so as the director of football at

Stoke City. Neither of them ever gave up. Football consumed them. I would often see them watching our reserve team play in front of a handful of fans.

The relentless perseverance of these men was matched by some players on the pitch. Three for whom I developed great admiration were Tony Adams of Arsenal, Gianfranco Zola when he played for Chelsea and Jamie Carragher of Liverpool. I always thought Adams was a United player in the wrong shirt. Alcohol has ruined the careers and lives of many footballers, and at United the sad legacy of George Best will always loom large in our collective memories, so Tony's brave confrontation with his demons at the end of the 1990s was, in itself, extraordinary. But it was what he made himself on the field that captured my attention. What he lacked in talent and pace, he more than compensated for in attitude. He was an average player who transformed himself into an outstanding leader through sheer hard work and application. He always had a winning attitude, and handsomely repaid both George Graham's and Arsène Wenger's faith in him.

I thought Zola was a fantastic example of workmanship. He always gave us trouble but he just never gave up. Even though he is a small man, he could more than hold his own with defenders who were eight or ten inches taller and far stronger. He was full of guile, inordinately creative and completely relentless. His approach to the game dovetailed with mine.

Jamie Carragher trained with United as a youngster. When he was with us he was a midfielder and a mundane, run-of-the-mill player. After he signed for Liverpool, he somehow transformed himself into the heart and soul of the team and its controlling force. In my last season he came on as a substitute in a game that we controlled and I whispered to him, 'Just

a wee word, stop kicking our boys.' He responded, 'I'm going to kick every one of them.' I have spent some time with him since I retired and have been really impressed. I wouldn't be surprised if he becomes Liverpool's manager at some point in the future, but first he has to decide if he wants to leave the TV studio and get back into a more challenging role in football.

At United we have been blessed with many players who have this sort of winning attitude. When winning becomes a way of life, true winners are relentless. Corny though it sounds, the very best footballers were competing against themselves to become as good as they could be. It was no accident that players like Ronaldo, Beckham, the Neville brothers, Cantona, Scholes, Giggs and Rooney would all have to be dragged off the training ground. They all just had a built-in desire to excel and improve. Gary Neville, for example, pushed himself harder because he knew that he did not possess the natural talent of some of his team-mates. I never used to worry about what he was up to on a Friday night because, certainly in his younger years, he would always be in bed by 9.30 p.m.

David Beckham was also extraordinary. When he came to us he lived in digs, and would not just train in the mornings and afternoons, but would then show up in the evening to train with the schoolboys. When, at the start of the season, we gave players what in England is called the 'bleep test', to get a sense of their level of aerobic fitness, Beckham would always be off the scales. The same goes for Ronaldo. He had this desire to become the greatest player in the world and was determined to do so. He also paid tremendous attention to nutrition, which pre-dated his move to England. These days he is religious about taking ice baths after every game so that he can continue to play at the level he demands of himself. He does not touch alcohol, and keeps himself at about three kilograms below his

natural weight because, now in his thirties, he has found this helps him maintain his pace.

In a perfect world I would have filled every team-sheet with 11 men who had as much determination as talent. But life is not like that, and if I had to choose between someone who had great talent but was short on grit and desire, and another player who was good but had great determination and drive, I would always prefer the latter. The former might work well for a brief period, but they never have the staying power that gives a great club stability and consistency.

The work ethic I have just described of a handful of managers and players is true of the very best athletes in any sport. They have a formidable appetite for work and extraordinary self-discipline. Look at A. P. McCoy, the jockey who won more than 4,000 races and who, over the course of his career, broke every single rib and numerous other bones. His natural weight is about 75 kg, but for about 25 years he has kept himself at about 63 kg. When he announced his retirement, his wife said she would finally have to learn how to cook potatoes. Novak Djokovic, the tennis champion who is a friend of United's long-time defender, Nemanja Vidić, has a similar intensity. You can only marvel when you hear about his fitness routine and dietary regimen.

The world's best footballers are just as disciplined, even though the occasional photograph of them sunning themselves in Dubai or at a nightclub with a young lady may suggest otherwise. They need to work relentlessly, not just because that's what is required to get to the top, but because there is always someone eager to take their place in the squad. It also explains why almost all football players have working-class roots.

Understandably, middle-class parents want to make sure

their boys go to college or acquire skills which means football never gets as much attention in those households. Around the world, football attracts boys for whom further education is unlikely and who have no choice but to work very hard on acquiring and improving their footballing skills as the path towards a better life. Today the phrase 'working class' does not carry the same connotations as it did decades ago, but most of United's players came from what nowadays are called 'lower-income households'. I don't want to sound like an old fogey, but the overall rise in the standard of living means that today's players grew up with hot water, television, telephones, computers, cars and budget airlines, and in physical surroundings that are far more comfortable than those in which I grew up. I've long had a soft spot for people from a working-class background, because I think it prepares them for the hardness of life.

For almost all the British players who played for me, football was their ticket out of miserable circumstances. Ryan Giggs had a tough start. He was born in Cardiff to a mother who was just 17 and, because his paternal grandfather was from Sierra Leone, Ryan had to deal with racial taunts as a child. As a small boy he was uprooted from Wales when his father, Danny Wilson, left rugby union to become a professional rugby league player in the north of England. His father left the family home, and Ryan was raised by his mother, who was born Lynne Giggs, in Salford, where he developed his footballing touch. Lynne worked two jobs – as a barmaid and auxiliary nurse – though as a single mother never had enough money to be able to afford to buy the best boots for Ryan; but she instilled in him the capacity for hard work. She is a real saint, and Ryan paid perpetual tribute to her when he changed his surname from Wilson.

David Beckham came from a small house in East London and his father worked as a heating engineer. Paul Scholes grew up in a council house in Langley and Nicky Butt hailed from Gorton – both places where you won't see a Bentley parked in the drive. Wayne Rooney comes from a hard neighbourhood in Liverpool and gave serious thought to becoming a professional boxer. Danny Welbeck and Wes Brown both grew up in Longsight, a Manchester neighbourhood known for gang violence. Bryan Robson's dad was a lorry driver. Rio Ferdinand grew up in Peckham, one of the poorest areas of London. The list is endless.

Over the years I became better at judging the influence of background on a British player, because we would know the family backgrounds and the schools that the boys attended. It was more difficult to judge those sorts of nuances, and the character of a player, when we started recruiting from South America or Eastern Europe. Until around the mid-1990s, the youngsters would also understand their place in the pecking order at the club. They would be responsible for removing mud from boots, cleaning the dressing room and doing 'balls and bibs' – collecting the balls and shirt bibs that the players had scattered and dropped on the training ground. The boys would understand that the first-team dressing room was strictly out of bounds. Those sorts of rituals probably just made them yearn for success all the more.

In my last decade as a manager, I often found the traits I had previously found in British players visible in boys who had grown up overseas. Cristiano Ronaldo certainly knew what it was like to struggle. He grew up in a village in Madeira in a family that had very little money and was brought up by his mother. Tim Howard, who made 77 appearances in goal for United, was raised in New Jersey by a single mother who had

emigrated to the United States from Hungary, and held down two jobs after Tim's father left the scene. The Da Silva twins were another case. They had grown up in Petrópolis in Brazil, and had an astonishing work ethic. Rafael would show up to our training sessions on the coldest of Manchester days wearing a short-sleeved shirt and shorts, while everyone else, including me, was wrapped in layers. At the end of one season I told the pair of them to make sure they got a good rest over the summer, and discovered that their father built a full-size pitch in their hometown so that they could play every day with their mates.

The majority of the foreign players also made football their ticket to the future. The very best have a deeply ingrained capacity for industry, and intuitively grasp that if you can connect talent and work, you can achieve so much. I came from an era when my father made my Christmas toys, and I suspect some of the foreign players empathise with that. Many of the players we signed came from circumstances every bit as grim, perhaps grimmer, than their British team-mates. Adnan Januzaj, who we signed as a 16 year old in March 2011 was born in Belgium, after his parents fled the brutality of the former Yugoslavia. The Ecudorian Antonio Valencia comes from a very poor background, as did the Brazilian, Anderson. Andrei Kanchelskis, who played for us in the 1990s, grew up in the Soviet Union. Carlos Tévez came from the drug-ridden desolation of the 'Fort Apache' neighbourhood in Buenos Aires. Quinton Fortune was reared in a township in apartheid South Africa.

Sadly, there are examples of players who have similar backgrounds to Giggs or Cristiano Ronaldo, who, despite enormous natural talent, just aren't emotionally or mentally strong enough to overcome the hurts of their childhood and their inner demons. Ravel Morrison might be the saddest case. He possessed as much natural talent as any youngster we ever signed, but

kept getting into trouble. It was very painful to sell him to West Ham in 2012 because he could have been a fantastic player. But, over a period of years, the problems off the pitch continued to escalate and we had little option but to cut the cord. There has been little evidence that Ravel has matured and his contract was cancelled by West Ham in 2015.

I have an abiding belief about the virtues of tapping the hunger and drive that can be found in people who have had tough upbringings. Whenever we had a setback at United and everyone needed a bit of a boost, I'd always end team talks before a game by reminding the players that they all came from working-class backgrounds where people didn't have much. I would tell them that it's almost certain that their grandparents or someone in their family used to be working class and worked hard every day just to survive whereas all they had to do was work hard for 90 minutes while getting paid a lot of money. In retrospect the phrase 'working class' might not have meant much to some, especially the foreign players, but I think they all knew people who had been through tough times. We all felt ourselves to be outsiders in some ways, and people who feel like outsiders do one of two things: they either feel rejected, carry a chip on their shoulder and complain that life is unfair, or they use that sense of isolation to push themselves and work like Trojans. I always used to tell the players, 'The minute that we don't work harder than the other team, we'll not be Manchester United.'

Drive

For years I've tried to fathom out why some people possess greater drive than others. I'm not sure I am any closer to solving

that riddle today than I was 30 years ago, but I did learn how to harness that power and as I said, I do know that if I had to pick drive or talent as the most potent fuel, it would be the former. For me drive means a combination of a willingness to work hard, emotional fortitude, enormous powers of concentration and a refusal to admit defeat.

At United, there were many players who epitomised the drive required to become successful. At the forefront were the likes of Bryan Robson, Roy Keane, Steve Bruce, Mark Hughes, Brian McClair and Patrice Evra. One player's drive can have an enormous effect on a team – a winning drive is like a magical potion that can spread from one person to another. Bryan Robson was a foreigner to danger. He came from Chester-le-Street, County Durham, a coal-mining area in the north of England, and would plough right into situations that others would avoid. It resulted in him spending a lot of time on the injury list, but it also made him an invaluable leader. Despite dislocating his shoulder several times during his career, he would regularly engage in a daily regime of one thousand press-ups. I used to show players a photograph of Robson defending a corner. His eyes were almost glazed over; he had shut out the rest of the world, and the only thing he was concentrating on was how to make sure that the corner kick was defended properly.

Roy Keane's relentless drive was inspirational. Steve Bruce played 414 games in the centre of our defence, was fearless and a great organiser, but he didn't quite have enough pace. However, like Tony Adams, he made up for his shortcomings with a deeply rooted will to win that was infectious.

David Beckham had a great thirst for victory, as did Nicky Butt, who made 387 appearances for United and was a local lad. The two Neville brothers who came from Bury (just

outside Manchester), and Denis Irwin who, like Roy Keane, came from Cork, all had a distinctive drive. They shared similar characteristics: they were entirely dedicated to the club; all were absolutely reliable players who could be counted on to play in 80 per cent of our games; and all could infect others in the team with their will. None of these players relished the sour taste of defeat. Fortunately, as the years went by, we were able to have more players with this sort of edge in the first team.

By singling out these players I don't mean to detract from the others I managed. The reason I mention them is because they did not possess the innate talents of players like Hughes, Cole, Cantona, Verón, Scholes, Giggs and Ronaldo. I use them as examples of drive because, by the application of sheer will-power, undiluted courage and determination, they more than overcame any shortcomings.

Sometimes the drive got out of control and I had to step in. There was an occasion when we played Middlesbrough that a group of players went after the referee like a pack of dogs and I went off my head with them. But I also wanted to be careful that I didn't inadvertently demotivate them. The minute you start intruding too far, you take the drive out of the man. Believe me, it is far easier to do that than to put the drive into someone to whom it does not come naturally. You usually cannot instil an edge in a player if somehow or other he didn't acquire it before he was a teenager. Every now and again there is an example that gives you hope. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer comes to mind. He grew up in a small, quiet Norwegian fishing village, and when he arrived at Old Trafford in 1996 at the age of 23, he looked like a 14-year-old choirboy; there was a certain softness about him. United offered him his first real taste of what victory could be like. He gradually acquired a taste for this and,

as a result, became much more aggressive as a player and developed real conviction.

Conviction

Most people don't have inner conviction. Their confidence is easily shaken, they blow with the wind and can be plagued with doubts. I cannot imagine how anyone, without firm convictions and deep inner beliefs, can be an effective leader. As a player my confidence was shaken when Rangers dropped me and wanted me to agree to a transfer as a part-exchange for another player. But I was determined that I wouldn't let them beat me, and before training I used to go and play nine holes of golf to clear my head and get ready to attack the day. I just resolved not to give in and, when they sold me to Falkirk in 1969, it was on my own terms.

When I did waver, or at least was not being true to myself, it sometimes took another person to shake me out of my stupor. There was an occasion during my early time at United in 1991 when Jock Wallace, the former manager of Rangers, phoned me and said he was coming to watch us play Southampton. Jock was suffering from Parkinson's but he was as shrewd as ever and, after the game, we went out for dinner and he said, 'That's not an Alex Ferguson team. Once you get an Alex Ferguson team, you'll be all right.' It was a wonderful piece of advice because I hadn't been entirely true to my own beliefs. I knew some of the players weren't good enough but, instead of selling them, I'd been trying to turn them into something they weren't capable of becoming. John Lyall, the West Ham manager, told me something very similar. He said, 'Make sure you see Alex Ferguson in your team.' Both Jock and John were implicitly

telling me to be true to my own beliefs and convictions. Today, I use the same line with other managers I am trying to encourage.

I don't remember many periods of self-doubt, particularly after I left Aberdeen. I had worked hard and served a footballing apprenticeship that, from the time I started playing to the time I left Scotland, had lasted more than 29 years, and I had achieved considerable success at Aberdeen. These experiences helped harden my inner beliefs and strengthened my confidence in my own conviction. When I was offered the United job, I was very proud and felt confident in my own judgement and abilities. But after I arrived at Old Trafford, and I saw what I had to contend with regarding the drinking culture, I got a bit rattled. I wondered, 'What have I got myself into?' There was a time in 1989 and the start of 1990 when things just weren't going right with United. Of our opening 24 League games we had only managed to win six, and from the end of November 1989 until early February 1990, it was bleak. We won none of our 11 League games. In fact, after we beat Nottingham Forest on 12 November 1989, we did not win another home game until we played Luton Town on 3 March 1990. The fans were getting restless and the media were sharpening their knives. Compared to the consistent level of success I had experienced at Aberdeen, it was a shock to find myself in that situation. My son Jason, who was in his teens at the time, remembers sitting in the kitchen in tears during this drought, asking whether we could just move back to Aberdeen. He tells me now that I said, 'No. We're going to crack on. It's going to work.'

It's one thing to have confidence in your own abilities. It's a completely different challenge to instil confidence in others. Every player is always competing for their place in the side. If they emerged from the academy, progressed through the reserves and made it into the first-team squad, there was always the

prospect of someone else emerging through the youth system, or from the transfer market, who might be better. At the end of every season there were always members of the squad who went on their summer holidays unsure whether their place would be assured when we played our first League game the following August. Young players are usually intimidated by the veterans, in part because they are playing alongside their boyhood idols, while the older players are always battling with the spectre of age and injury. Even if an injury does not bring a rude end to a career or, worse still, the promise of a career, as happened with young Ben Thornley in 1994, it erodes a player's confidence and spirit.

Many players, particularly the younger ones, take their bodies for granted as reliable allies. Yet after an injury, they immediately enter no man's land, where they stop travelling with the team, work through rehab by themselves, and have to deal with the uncertainty of whether they will recover or if the club will buy a replacement. Some are even plagued with guilt about being paid when, in their own mind, they are not contributing anything. Two examples come to mind: when Fernando Redondo joined AC Milan from Real Madrid, he suffered an awful knee injury in one of his first training sessions, and refused to be paid until he was fit to play. It was two and a half years before he made his debut and he didn't take a penny off his new club in that time. When Martin Buchan left Manchester United in 1983 after 11 years of service, he joined Oldham Athletic and received a hefty signing-on fee in the process. Early in his second season he realised that he no longer had what it took to be playing professional football, so knocked on his manager's door, retired, and returned his signing-on fee. Two class acts from men of honour.

Every player can have his confidence rattled during a game.

They may be having an off day, they don't want the ball to come in their direction and, believe it or not, they may even secretly want to get substituted. I always found that strikers and goalkeepers had the most doubts about themselves and, if their confidence was shaken, they completely changed. When goal-scorers don't score, they are convinced they will never score again, and when they score they cannot imagine they will ever miss another opportunity. All my strikers were like that, including Mark Hughes, Eric Cantona and Ruud van Nistelrooy. Mark Hughes, who in recent years has been a manager, played for United between 1983 and 1986, and 1988 and 1995; he was as tough as nails and a man of great determination. Mark was born to be a big game player and could always be counted on in the most important games, but was deeply affected when he didn't score.

Van Nistelrooy's entire identity as a man was bound up with scoring goals. When he didn't score in a game, even if we won, the storm clouds would gather. He had that Calvinist attitude which meant he felt he hadn't earned his keep and didn't deserve to be paid if he failed to score. Without doubt, of all the strikers I managed, he was the most single-minded. His whole existence revolved around scoring goals. After we beat Everton in 2003 to win the League, Ruud ran straight to the dressing room to see whether he or Thierry Henry had won the Golden Boot, the award given to the Premier League player who has scored the most goals in the season. It turned out that he'd won it that year and could enjoy his summer.

As for goalkeepers, Tim Howard has had a wonderful career at Everton since he left United in 2006. However, though he got off to a good start during his first season at Old Trafford, after we brought him over from America, his confidence never seemed to be the same after he made a mistake in 2004

against FC Porto, which eliminated us from that year's Champions League competition. It rattled him to his core, and though he came back into the side, he never seemed impregnable. I feel for goalkeepers because, after they let in a goal, everyone in the entire stadium is looking at them. It's all too easy to forget about the mistimed tackle, the three bad passes or the botched back pass that caused the goal in the first place.

When David de Gea joined us in 2011, he had the unenviable task of filling a role that had been masterfully occupied by the Dutchman, Edwin van der Sar, for six years. David was just 20 and, though he was tall, he had yet to develop the muscular strength to deal with some of the Premier League's bruisers. His first few months were mixed and both the press and the fans were on his back. After one game, I could see that he was down, so rather than talk to him directly, I chose to make my remarks to the whole team. I told them that David was a perfect example of the character of United and that he had come to England not speaking a word of English, didn't even have a driver's licence, and then gets a weekly hammering from strikers who have been ordered to make his life miserable. I could see when I finished that my little talk had lifted his spirits. He is now among the very best keepers in the world, thanks to the work of Eric Steele, the goalkeeping coach, and others.

The other place where the level of individual confidence is revealed is when penalty kicks are taken in a sudden-death finish. Some players, like Patrice Evra, would be spectacular penalty takers during practice but dreaded the idea of being asked to do the same in a game. Paul Ince was the same, and Wes Brown, our long-time stalwart defender, would sooner have played barefoot than take a penalty. I think Wes prayed that

the game would be decided before he had to take his turn. Then there were the guys who just brimmed with confidence. On the rare occasion that Eric Cantona would miss from the spot, he had a look on his face that said to the world, 'How did that happen?' I don't think he thought it conceivable that he could miss a penalty. Denis Irwin, Steve Bruce, Brian McClair, Ruud van Nistelrooy, Robin van Persie, Wayne Rooney: all relished hammering in penalties. Rooney seems to excel when he is under pressure. In May 2011 we were trailing Blackburn Rovers 1–0, needed a point to win the League, and 17 minutes from the end of regular time we got a penalty. Rooney absolutely battered it into the top corner. I'm sure it helps that, even before he has taken the field in any given match, Wayne has decided where he will place the ball if he takes a penalty kick.

From time to time, I'd slide players on in the last few minutes of regular time if I sensed we were heading for a sudden-death finish. I did that in the 2008 Champions League final when I sent on Anderson, the Brazilian midfielder, to take a penalty kick. He was only 20 at the time, but he had all the confidence in the world and scored our sixth penalty, helping us beat Chelsea for our third success in the competition.

Sometimes the occasion would overwhelm even the most experienced of players. You can imagine the tension associated with what might have been the biggest single game of a player's career. It is unrealistic to think that all of them can ignore the press build-up, block out the noise and atmosphere inside a stadium and treat a cup final – particularly a Champions League final – as just another game against 11 mortals. Life does not work that way. When we played Barcelona in Rotterdam in the 1991 European Cup Winners' Cup final, Paul Ince, who was 23 years old at the time, was a bag of nerves. It did not help

matters that the kick-off was delayed to allow the crowd to finish entering the stadium. Paul had a rocky first half, during which Bryan Robson had been snapping at him. At half-time I said to him, 'Incey, just concentrate on the game. Forget everything that's happened before the game. Nothing bad is going to happen. Just go and relax and enjoy it.' In the second half he was much better and worked brilliantly with Robson to protect our defence.

We also had peculiar situations when a player might voluntarily make life more difficult for himself and increase his own anxiety level. That happened in 1995 when we were knocked out of the UEFA Cup at Old Trafford by Rotor Volgograd. I had picked John O'Kane, who was a gifted player but had only appeared a few times in the first team, to play right-back. Ten minutes before the kick-off, well after the team-sheets had been submitted, he told me he wanted to play left-back. It was clear that he was rattled by the prospect of the game, but there was nothing I could do. It was a death wish because he was up against a Volgograd winger who was a flying machine. I put Phil Neville at right-back, played O'Kane at left-back and pulled him out of the game before half an hour had gone by, after he had been torn apart.

Every now and again, something beyond our control would rattle the confidence and resolve of the entire club. At those sorts of junctures it's vital to boost the collective confidence. When Manchester City started forking out the biggest sums ever seen in Britain, it was natural that everyone at United would be reading the newspapers with a mixture of shock and awe. This was exacerbated when we gave Manchester City the League championship on goal difference in 2012 after we only got ten points out of a possible 18 in the final six games of the season. I know people will misinterpret this,

or take it for sour grapes, but City didn't win that championship; we lost it.

I used City's Premier League title to buttress everyone's confidence later that summer. As we reassembled for the following season, I kept reiterating that United expected to win absolutely every game we played. It didn't matter whether our opponent was the reigning Premier League, or Champions League champions, or a fourth division team we'd drawn in the FA Cup. I was just able to keep reinforcing the ideology that no club was bigger than United – no matter whether their owner controlled all the oil in the Persian Gulf, or every coalmine in Russia.