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Tom Brady, the Patriots, and the NFL: Think about the process

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Tom Brady, a famous football player, was recently punished for allegedly having someone deflate footballs so that he could have a competitive advantage. The NFL suspended him without pay for four games, fined the Patriots one million dollars, and took

away two of the team's draft picks. Four months later, a federal judge ruled that Brady was not given due process, and overturned his suspension.

Because the whole country is up in arms about the severity (or lack of severity) of the penalty, you might think I am going to comment on the penalty. You would be wrong. There

is no winning that argument. But there is a lesson to be learned that most people are missing: Think about the process. Develop and defend the process.

Determining discipline is very hard—not just for the NFL, but for every organization. Ensuring consistent discipline for unlike infractions is almost impossible. Ensuring that everyone is disciplined the same for the same offense—whether they are the doorman or the CEO—is hard. But every organization needs to do the best they can. Seeking outside consultants and attorneys can help. Having policies can help. Making the disciplinary determinations with a group of unconflicted people will help. But having a process is the key. Focus on the process.

The NFL's penalty for this offense was never going to please everyone. It's an impossible task. It's always either too much or too little. I don't know their process and I don't care—it's not my point. I am concerned about the disciplinary process in general. There are organizations that get into situations like this and completely mess it up because they either do not have a process or they do not follow their disciplinary process. People will always complain about disciplinary decisions; you do the best you can. Let it go and focus on your process.

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"Focus on the process" is actually applicable to any difficult/controversial decision you have to make. When people complain about decisions we make, I tell them the entire process. I do not discuss any particular case but explain the process in as much detail as I can. I am willing to discuss the process and listen to ideas about improving the process. We believe in our decision-making process.

Although some decisions will be controversial and result in a lot of second-guessing, if you focus on the process, it is easier to let all of the second-guessing go. People may not agree with the result, but they will respect the organization and the process. ☺



Snell