

## Discussion Questions for *Miracle*

**Some of the major characters to watch for:** Herb Brooks, Patti Brooks, Craig Patrick, Mike Eruzione, Jim Craig, Jack O'Callahan, Doc Nagobads

1. About 13 minutes into the film, Brooks is watching the week-long tryouts but selects his team within the first few hours. His assistant coach, Craig Patrick, looks at the list incredulously and says to Brooks "You're missing some of the best players." Brooks responds "I'm not looking for the best players; I'm looking for the right ones." Comment on the difference and why that might matter.
2. An Advisory Board was also to help select this team, but Brooks did not consult them. When confronted about this, what is Brooks responds that he knows these guys – that he's studied every one of them and talked with their college coaches and that he's not going to change his mind. At home, Brooks took a similar approach with his wife after being given the job of Olympic Team Head Coach; that is, he unilaterally decided that he was not going to be very available to the family for the seven months leading up to the Olympic Games. In your opinion, is this just ego, or expediency, or is there wisdom in this unilateral approach to decision making?
3. At the tryouts, after the assistant coach calls the names of the 26 guys who made the initial roster, Coach Brooks appears to them for the first time. With the cut players walking out he says to his team "Take a good look, gentlemen, 'cause they're the ones getting off easy ... The final roster will have 20 names on it in seven months, so more of you are going home. If you give 99 percent, you'll make my job very, very easy. I'll be your coach; I won't be your friend. If you need one of those, take it up with Doc or Coach Patrick." And then Brooks walks out.

Comment on Brooks's decision to take this initial disposition toward his team. Where else in the film do we see this continue and what do you think of this leadership style?

4. To build the boys into a team, Brooks uses some interesting methods, including letting them physically fight with one another, repeatedly asking them “who do you play for?” and giving them a common enemy, namely himself. Brooks’s goal, he says, is to develop team chemistry, something he claims will be their competitive advantage. Comment on this intangible attribute of a team and the coach’s approach to cultivating it.
  
5. One thing that is undeniable is that Coach Brooks got phenomenal results. Another is that he was intimidating, dictatorial and often harsh with his players. In this situation, does the former require the latter? Might another leadership style have achieved the same results?
  
6. Doc, who has worked with Brooks for a long time, says at one point that this is not Brooks’s usual coaching style at the University of Minnesota. What might we conclude from that?
  
7. Brooks’s hockey knowledge seems to far excel that of his players. Why is that relevant to effective leadership and how important is it for a leader to be the smartest person in the room?
  
8. Brooks is quick to call out players when he does not like what he sees. He is not a conflict avoider; instead, his response to under-performance is direct and immediate.

Identify some times when Brooks did that. How essential is it for a leader to be willing to quickly confront attitudes and behaviors that he or she considers to be inadequate? What is in the way of consistently doing that and how might a person overcome it?

9. Some think that there needs to be a level of “separateness” between leader and followers. We see this throughout the film, but especially at the Christmas party, where Brooks attends but does not stay very long (though his assistant coach does). What do you think of this?
  
10. Brooks seems to be the kind of guy who is never satisfied with his players. Even when he is complimenting them he says things like: “That’s better. Not good, but better.” Should he have been more encouraging, or was it necessary to withhold affirmation to keep the momentum toward continuous improvement?
  
11. We see a number of times where Brooks sacrifices family for work. Did he do a poor job of prioritizing or was this simply necessary given the task at hand?
  
12. How might Coach Brooks’s approach during these seven months be an illustration of the power of simplicity (i.e., focus) in leadership? How much did that help him and the team?