

76ers CEO on Leading Leaders



When Scott O'Neil was first recruited as Vice President to the Philadelphia 76ers, it was known as "one of the worst franchises in professional sports." Their 10W-72L record was among the worst in the history of the NBA. However, that allowed the Sixers the opportunity to get the number one pick and Scott the opportunity to develop a culture from the ground up. Despite the team's bad record, Scott came into work happy every day. What motivated Scott to get up every morning and put his best foot forward, was the desire to develop the next generation of great leaders.

During the 90s dot-com boom, Scott O'Neil launched an online network called HoopsTV with a friend. Business was great at first—HoopsTV had raised \$15 million and became one of the top two online basketball companies in the world. Just 18 short months later, O'Neil went from meeting with Phil Knight of Nike to David Stern of the NBA to selling the office furniture and letting go of all his employees. Scott acknowledged that he made many mistakes running HoopsTV but what he learned from the setback propelled him into becoming an exemplary leader.

Scott O'Neil remembers the moment that jump-started his life back up after that difficult experience. It was when he was leaving for a trip to Chicago and his wife had handed him a book called "Leadership & Self-Deception" on his way out. During the Arbinger 2019 Summit, Scott spoke about how this

book changed his life and is now a core part of who he is.

In his Summit speech, he recalled the time he was hired as Vice President at the NBA and did not go through a formal [onboarding](#) process. He did not get a phone, a computer, business cards, or an office. He had to ask his boss for help to get the things he needed to do his job.

That onboarding—or lack of—had quite an impact on him. Scott recounted “if I’m ever in a position of power, my onboarding is going to look different from that.” Now, as CEO of the Philadelphia 76ers and the New Jersey Devils, Scott O’Neil takes pride in the workplace culture he developed. As soon as an employee is hired at his company, they get t-shirts and hats for their families, a welcome letter, a packet on where to live, a packet on local schools, and a copy of [Leadership and Self-Deception](#).

When he shares the book, he exchanges personal notes with new hires and asks them to share their thoughts with him. He loves getting letters from the new hires and enjoys hearing the impact and influences the concepts in the book have had on them.

One of his core principles of an outstanding workplace culture is to ‘be where your feet are.’ This principle teaches people to be present, put the phone down, and pay attention to what’s happening in the moment. As a leader, it’s essential for Scott to make sure that he and his employees are present and engaged in the work that they are doing. In his book [Be Where Your Feet Are](#), he shares the valuable lessons he’s learned throughout his personal life and his career.

On his first day as CEO of the Philadelphia 76ers, Scott O’Neil said that he “wants this to be the greatest place to work in the world.” Learning from his past mistakes, Scott has worked hard to create a thriving workplace environment. As a result, the Sixers organization has been named “the best place

to work in Philadelphia” for three consecutive years. In May 2021, the team clinched the top seed in the Eastern Conference [for the first time in twenty years](#).

Through his commitment to developing the next generation of leaders, Scott O’Neil proves that when leaders truly care for their employees, they can make a great impact on the organization’s culture.