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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Toxic Cultures, Bad Bosses & Disengaged Workers**

### **WORKPLACE LESSONS FROM ESPN'S *THE LAST DANCE***

**CHICAGO, May 14, 2020** – ESPN's new ten-part documentary series on the Michael Jordan-era Chicago Bulls, *The Last Dance*, includes plenty of 90s nostalgia, good music, and incredible basketball, but also important lessons for employers nationwide on leadership, culture, and talent management, according to one workplace authority.

"Any organization strives to foster a collaborative culture and encourage growth and success. Employers are generally slow to dismantle teams that are performing at the highest level," said Andrew Challenger, Senior Vice President of global outplacement and executive and business coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

"While good companies should plan for the future, leaders need to recognize their talent. They need to reward and motivate their current high performers," he added.

The series follows the meteoric rise of the Chicago Bulls, from Michael Jordan's joining the team in 1984 to Jerry Krause assembling an all-star starting crew, including replacing coach Doug Collins with Phil Jackson in 1989. Scottie Pippen became Jordan's number two, and Dennis Rodman eventually became the number three man. Supported by a cast of talented players, the Chicago Bulls won six championships between 1991 and 1998.

Under coach Phil Jackson, the offense went from a Jordan-centric one to a team-focused game, allowing for all players to contribute rather than relying on one star player. Even with more team-focused play, Jordan still emerged as the NBA League MVP five times in his career.

"The documentary highlights leadership that is able to recognize individual talents and how to accommodate the work styles of each member to bring forth the highest potential of the team," said Challenger.

In the third episode, it becomes clear that Dennis Rodman had his very own unique work style, and given some space with encouraging support, he would perform optimally. When he asked for a vacation to Las Vegas during the 1998 season, Jackson and Jordan, though hesitant, accommodated his request. The team went on to win its sixth Championship that year.

While the series shows the best in leadership and teambuilding, it also shows how distrust with management and unfair compensation cause organizations to sour. During the height of the Bulls' greatness in 1997 and 1998, General Manager Jerry Krause, with the backing of Owner Jerry Reinsdorf, put a clock on Phil Jackson's coaching tenure, which led to star player Michael Jordan's exit.

Meanwhile, Scottie Pippen, who himself was a seven-time All-Star, was disengaging from the organization after management's failure to restructure his contract, which was one of the lowest paying for the league, despite his pivotal role in the organization.

"Companies are constantly grappling with how to compensate their high-performing talent. It is imperative that leaders assess market offerings and compare them with what they are offering in order to keep good people from leaving," said Challenger.

"When workers begin to distrust management, it impacts morale across the organization and it becomes very difficult for leaders to regain that trust," he added.

Challenger offered the following tips on how the workplace can avoid "The Last Dance:"

**Recognize Your Talent:** Workers do not leave bad jobs, they leave bad bosses. Leaders need to value and recognize the contributions of their talent. According to a 2019 survey from WorldatWork and Maritz, 88% of companies that have recognition programs implement them company-wide. Meanwhile, 19% reported they had no recognition program or philosophy. Another 68% of companies reported they use these programs to promote high performance.

**Take Engagement Surveys:** Not only should leaders be aware of what their teams are working on, they should also know how they are feeling. Take regular surveys to measure how invested workers are in their jobs and how supported they feel, so they are able to perform their tasks most effectively.

**Identify and Accommodate Different Work Styles:** Aptitude and personality tests are often used during the hiring and onboarding process, but these same tests should be administered throughout employee tenure. "Work styles change as people grow both professionally and personally. Good leaders will keep their finger on the pulse of how their team members work most optimally and will adjust accordingly. Flexibility from leaders is really key," said Challenger.

**Foster a Team Environment:** While it is important to recognize individual contributions, leaders should let their workers know that they have reliable support to help achieve both individual and company-wide goals.

**Give Your Workers a Chance to Truly Recharge:** A 2018 Survey from the American Psychological Association found that 32% of workers reported their workloads make it difficult for them to take vacations, and 26% reported they worry they miss opportunities when they do take time off. Meanwhile, 71% of workers at companies who encourage vacations feel more motivated when they return to work, compared to 45% of workers at companies that do not strongly encourage time away from work. Allow your workers to take breaks without worrying that it is costing them a promotion or opportunities to advance. They will be more productive, leading to a positive workplace culture.

**If Something Is Working, Leave It Alone:** If the workforce is regularly hitting targets and meeting or exceeding expectations and goals, leaders should recognize, encourage, and support the people and processes that lead to that productivity. Implement policies that will foster growth instead of disrupting the progress that has already been made.

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