



# Shaq's game plan one to copy

By **RAYMOND P. HOWELL**

Last night, hundreds of thousands of Bay Staters were glued to their televisions to watch the Celtics debut of Shaquille O'Neal. Candidates running in Tuesday's elections should have tuned into his post-game press conference. As good as he is on the basketball court, Shaq may be even better in the public relations arena.

In just a few short weeks the 7-foot giant has Boston in the palm of his hand. He's everywhere — standing in line for a burger, tweeting, making himself a statute in Harvard Square for an hour so that fans can take their picture with him or just hang out. More than that, he's done it without an entourage or

an attitude. He seems to love the city as much as we do. Maybe more. And so we're prepared to love him back.

We've been disappointed before by guys kind of like Shaq — sports celebrities who didn't live up to their billing, abandoned us or took themselves a little too seriously. But maybe, this time we have an athlete who is redefining what it means to be a Boston sports celebrity.

He actually seems to like the city and, even, the people who live here.

He comes with some personal baggage. But we don't care. It just makes him more human, more lived-in — more, like us. Except, he can dunk a basketball like we throw a coffee cup into the trash.

Boston's political and business leaders would indeed do well to watch closely. Here are the lessons they'd take away:

Be genuine.

Don't take yourself too seriously.

Be direct and if you don't know something, don't be afraid to say so.

Get outside of the venues where the rich, powerful and famous meet to relish being rich, powerful and famous. Hang out with regular people, not just for the purposes of a photo-op, but because you like people and enjoy the interaction. The regular people can tell the difference. Most of the best politicians of our time loved that part of the job.

Remember that it's not about you. It's about the

people who vote for you or pay your salary. Without them, you're unemployed. Treat them accordingly.

It will be interesting to watch how Shaq's first year as a Celtic plays out. We can be a tough crowd. But we'll forgive him a poor performance. Because we know that he knows that he plays a game for a living, that he hit the lottery, that millions of people would give anything to be in his place. We like him not because he's like us. Let's face it — he's not. We like him because he's the kind of celebrity that all of us hope we'd be if we were in his big shoes.

*Raymond P. Howell is president of Howell Communications.*