

Million dollar baby film overview



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

At the time Million Dollar Baby was released, it was very moderately hyped and wasn't advertised necessarily as a blockbuster must-see. But those who did go see it spread the word of its excellence quickly, as within a couple months the movie had grossed over \$100 million (IMBd) and had captured the hearts of not only the millions who flocked to see it but of even the harshest of critics, including Kirk Honeycutt of The Hollywood Reporter, dubbing Clint Eastwood's filmmaking "the cinematic equivalent of Hemingway's spare though precise prose" (Fandango).

The film ended the calendar year by collecting 4 Oscars, including Best Picture (Fandango). While many who saw the film probably expected a modern day Rocky with a female replacement, the storyline was much more than an athletic triumph. Director/Leading actor Clint Eastwood preferred a slightly darker tale that brought to light how desperation can lead to triumph. Maggie, played by Hillary Swank, and Frankie, played by Eastwood, begin with seemingly polar opposite personalities but as the movie progresses, it becomes clearer how similar their personality traits truly are (IMBd).

Many of these traits fall into the categories set out by Shelley Kirkpatrick and Edwin Locke while Frankie's personality in particular can be analyzed using Blake and Mouton's managerial grid (Kirkpatrick and Locke, Blake and Mouton). But before applying any theory to Million Dollar Baby, one must understand the basic storyline and plot that makes for such an interesting analysis. The beginning of the movie introduces the audience to Frankie Dunn, a moderately successful but extremely intelligent trainer, and Big

Willie Little, Frankie's protege whom he has trained for a number of years (Million Dollar Baby).

Big Willie had become a pretty successful fighter at this point, being offered multiple title bouts. But Frankie doesn't believe he's quite ready yet, telling him that a title bout could be a one-time opportunity and that it will be a few years until he's ready. The next day at training is when Maggie Fitzgerald, the namesake of the movie, is introduced. Maggie is a spunky trainee who currently waits tables at a local restaurant in order to pay her bills. She constantly attempts to get Dunn to train her but to no avail as he bluntly states that he " doesn't train girls".

However, after Big Willie leaves Dunn for a more successful manager that believes he's title fight-ready, he's left without a prize fighter to win him an elusive championship. Left with nothing and impressed with Maggie's persistence, he finally agrees to train her for the time being until he can set her up with a manager (Million Dollar Baby). Her first fight with the new manager begins with Maggie getting beaten and battered pretty badly until Frankie brings himself to go ringside and help her from the corner.

The move turns out to be the beginning of a string of knockouts by Maggie, eventually leading to an offer for her to fight the British Welterweight champion. After initial hesitation, Frankie accepts the offer. Before the fight, Frankie unveils an official boxer's robe for Maggie, with the words " Mo Chuisle" emblazoned on the back. Maggie continues her dominance across Europe until she is offered to fight Billie " The Blue Bear", a notoriously dirty fighter, for the World Welterweight title (Million Dollar Baby).

In the meantime between the offer and Frankie's acceptance of the offer, the audience is introduced to Maggie's trailer-ridden family, whom she buys a house for (Million Dollar Baby). To everyone's chagrin, her mother and sister are completely ungrateful and Maggie is ridiculed for risking her mother's welfare payments. It is now that the audience begins to understand Maggie's desperation-driven persistence. When the title fight finally comes around, Maggie struggles a bit at the beginning. But after a while, she finds her stride and begins dominating. After one of the rounds is over, she is unexpectedly sucker-punched by "The Blue Bear".

On her freefall to the mat, she hits her neck over the leg of her corner's chair, snapping her neck and leaving her paralyzed from the waist down. From this point of the movie on, the audience begins to see how strongly the bond between Maggie and Frankie has grown, as he refuses to leave her side and is there for her when her family tries to legally strip her of all her assets. And in the end he is there to carry out her final wish, to be euthanized while she can still remember the roar of the crowd and the chanting of her name, "Mo Chuisle" (Million Dollar Baby).

It is at this time that he reveals the meaning of "Mo Chuisle", which is "my darling, and my blood" and "my pulse" (Epinions). Frankie is clearly in a leadership position in the movie, relative to not only Maggie but also to his partner Eddie Dupris. However, the way in which he leads changes throughout the movie. In the beginning, when he firsts agrees to train Maggie, he takes a very 9, 1 approach to his leadership, telling her to simply listen to what he says and not ask questions (Blake and Mouton 187).

This changes throughout the movie and this shift can be analyzed using both Blake and Mouton's managerial grid and the successful leadership traits discussed by Kirkpatrick and Locke. While Maggie doesn't necessarily have an obvious leadership role in the movie, she very clearly displays a variety of traits discussed by Kirkpatrick and Locke and utilizes them not only in the ring but also in her relationship with Dunn. In the next two papers, I will break down in more detail how these two leadership theories apply to Frankie and Maggie's relationship and to analyze how this led to both their successes and their downfalls.