

Train Your Brain:

Peak Performance through Mental Training

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Excelling in sport – especially at the high school level – isn't always the easiest thing to accomplish. With the amount of pressures adolescents face on a daily basis, who can blame them if they lose focus every now and then? The purpose of this five-part series is to help you maintain that focus and drive through the use of some simple psychological tools. And no, you're not crazy just because you decide to slip a little mind power into your game. Although, you are probably crazy if you don't see this stuff being able to help you get to that next level whether that be playing in college, winning districts, or even just making the team.

You don't need to read these chapters in any type of sequential order. Feel free to read what interests you and go from there. Please note that the information presented in these lessons is by no means meant to undermine anything said or taught by your coach. The information presented is simply a summary of some of the more popular trends and research in sport and exercise psychology. Anyone interested in these topics could hop on-line or visit the media center to get this information.



Chapter 2: Leadership

"Good fellows are a dime a dozen, but an aggressive leader is priceless."

– Earl "Red" Blaik, Head Coach, Army Football

Are you a leader? If you are, how do you know? If you're not, what makes you feel this way? One way or the other, what do you think you makes a leader?

On every successful team, you will find a leader. In fact, you may find more than one. While some may lead by example, some may lead with the spoken word. Whatever the case may be, a good leader will inspire commitment, loyalty, confidence, and extraordinary performance in others. It's an honor to be chosen to lead a team; to represent them not only on the field of play, but in the halls of your school. Being a leader means you are ready to accept the blame and share the credit.

Leadership Styles

Typically, leadership styles usually fall somewhere on a spectrum with an autocratic approach at one end and a democratic approach at the other. An autocratic style is tightly

structured and is usually win orientated. Leaders with a democratic style are more athlete centered and cooperative. When it is appropriate, leaders will need to adopt a different leadership style to accommodate the situation. Good leaders will know when that time comes.

- ◆ **Autocratic style.** Solving the problem on your own. You make the decision based on the information available at the time, not with the help of others.
- ◆ **Autocratic/consultative style.** While ultimately you will still make the decision on your own, you enhance your knowledge of the situation by seeking out the thoughts and feelings of a few of your teammates.
- ◆ **Consultative style.** Before making your decision, you take the time to talk with: (1) each of your teammates individually or (2) the team as a whole. Your decision may or may not reflect your teammates' input.
- ◆ **Group (democratic) style.** You share the problem/situation with your teammates and together as a group, you come up with the solution/decision with little or no influence from you.

Types of Leadership

When we examine leadership in sport, we find the consistent emergence of four central themes.

- ◆ **Mental leadership** revolves around the ability to think clearly and rationally under pressure, focus attention on the task, and prepare for the challenges that are forthcoming. One could make the argument that this is the type of leadership that is needed from a team captain as they are often called upon to act decisively and effectively manage time, especially during a game.
- ◆ **Physical leadership** revolves around one leading by example. Simply stated, physical leaders choose to let their actions do all the talking. If a physical leader chooses to "talk the talk" (which they don't often choose to do), they will be able to back it up and "walk the talk," by "practicing what they preach."
- ◆ **Emotional leadership** revolves around what we might expect – an interest in the team from an emotional standpoint. Emotional leadership requires encouraging effective communication and trust in teammates. When a team is faced with adversity, it will need it's emotional leaders to instill confidence, hope, and a sense of challenge and excitement despite the circumstance. In addition to these challenging responsibilities, emotional leaders will demonstrate empathy, humility, and compassion when called upon to do so.
- ◆ **Spiritual leadership** revolves around the ability to encourage commitment and recruit energy to the team's mission, vision, and goals. Spiritual leaders help to get their teammates "psyched-up" and ready to compete. Spiritual leaders may be called upon to enforce ethical standards and a code of conduct governing both the team's and their behavior.

The Consequences of Good Leadership

When a coach or team member demonstrates a type of leadership that matches their team's preferences, satisfaction and optimal performance are likely to ensue (Chelladurai, 1993). While a great majority of the research done in the field of leadership in sport has been examined from a coaching perspective, the results can be applied to peers that often serve as team captains or such "non-designated" or "unspoken" leaders.

◆ Satisfaction of team members

As previously mentioned, when a team leader's decision-making style matches the preference that is preferred by his or her team's respective athletes, leadership effectiveness will be

highly rated. Conversely, athletes' satisfaction will be negatively affected when they do not experience the leadership style they prefer. This is especially true with behavior related to social support, positive feedback, and instruction. With these behaviors, the greater the discrepancy, the lower the satisfaction. Not surprisingly, when a leader offers a generous amount of social support and engages in democratic decision making, the satisfaction experienced by athletes is likely to be high.

◆ Team cohesion

In chapter 1 of this series, we spoke to the importance of team cohesion and its positive effect on performance. We're going to assume that your ultimate goal is not only to improve your own performance, but your team's as well. Teams with high levels of satisfaction due, in part, to an effective leadership style are more likely to be cohesive.

◆ Enhanced performance

Research supports the idea that good leadership behaviors promotes performance, especially when the preferred and actual behaviors are congruent to one another.

◆ Intrinsic (internal) motivation

As we will examine in chapter 3, intrinsic motivation is the motivation that comes from within. An athlete who is said to be intrinsically motivated does not need such external rewards as money or acclaim to maintain a high level of performance. That being said, some research (as cited in Weinberg & Gould, 2003) has suggested that leaders who exhibit an autocratic (controlling) style of behavior are more likely to have lower levels of intrinsic motivation and perceived competence – which in both cases, is not good (you'll understand why in chapter 3). Additionally, such autocratic behaviors were also reported to influence athletes' degree of persistence in their sport (meaning they're likely to give

A Leader's Checklist

(Adapted from Weinberg & Gould, 2003)

Read the following questions & determine if you are truly a leader.

- Do you lead by example?
- Are you concerned with the growth of your teammates?
- Do you take the steps to influence their growth?
- Do you remain focused on the team's goals?
- Are you concerned with what's going on with your teammates?
- Do you use your influence to create a desire from your teammates to follow the coach?
- Do you use activities as tools to teach attitudes & ideals?
- Are you concerned with those who don't "show up" & do you do something about it?

up rather than keep trying).

"Keys to Successful Leadership"

In his book, "Finding a Way to Win," Bill Parcells (1995), the current head coach of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys and winner of two Super Bowls, identifies what he believes to be the keys to successful leadership:

◆ Loyalty.

Parcells states the first task of leadership is to promote and enforce a collective loyalty to the team. Simply stated, leaders must encourage teamwork and unity.

◆ Integrity.

A leader's philosophy must be based on the leader's basic values, resistant to outside pressure, and must remain in place long enough for the team to experience success. Parcells states that the leader's philosophy must be communicated and accepted throughout the team.

◆ Flexibility.

While traditions are great, sometimes the way things have always been done needs to be changed. It would truly be a shame to miss out on doing something better just because it's been done that way.

◆ Confidence.

Building confidence in your teammates is as simple as putting them in a situation where you know they can be successful. Give them something that they are responsible for and the decision-making power to accomplish the job. Make sure you are there for them if they need the support.

◆ Accountability.

You need to be able to accept full responsibility for your actions. Accountability starts at the top and has a trickle-down effect.

◆ Candor.

Besides being honest and accurate when delivering a message, a leader must account for those who are receiving it and making sure they are ready to do so.

◆ Preparedness.

Leaders are well-prepared for not only the good, but the bad—no matter how unlikely or distasteful it may be.

◆ Resourcefulness.

A leader will not give up or quit, no matter how bleak the situation may seem. A leader will find a way.

◆ Self-discipline.

A leader will find a way to compete, no matter how powerful the opponent. Notice the use of the word "compete," not "win." While it is true you "play to win the game," one cannot begin to achieve victory unless they stick to the game-plan.

◆ Patience.

This virtue is most valuable and extremely rare when things are at their worst, such as when a team is performing poorly. A leader not only know what changes that need to be made, but also when to make them.

References

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