

## How a Coach's Leadership Style Affect Results

By, Kim Kranz, PT, DScPT, SCS  
Chief of Athlete Wellness, USA Gymnastics

There are many different forms of leadership but most of these can fall within 3 buckets: Transformational leadership, Transactional leadership, and Authoritative leadership.

Authoritative leadership describes a “Do as I say” form of coaching that is rigid, has high expectations and gives subordinates almost no voice in decisions that are made that affect them. There are not many rewards for a job well done. A job well done is what is expected. This might be the “tough coaching” that many of us grew up with. It is rarely effective at producing results in the long term and leads to a high degree of turnover.

Transactional leadership is best described as the “carrot and stick” method of leadership. The followers are monitored by their leader. If they perform well, they will get a reward. If they perform poorly, there is contempt and, sometimes, consequences. This works well for some people who are highly extrinsically motivated by rewards and fear consequences but does not inspire “followership” by many on the team.

Transformational leadership is a 4-prong method of leadership. The first prong requires the leader (the coach) to behave as a role model and gain trust and respect. The second prong involves inspirational motivation and requires a coach to hold high expectations and communicate a compelling vision of the future. The 3<sup>rd</sup> prong encourages followers (athletes) to consider different perspectives of the team and empowers athletes to contribute new ideas. The last piece of transformational leadership involves individualize consideration where coaches display genuine care and concern for their athletes by recognizing their individual needs.

If you want to know if you are a strong Transformational Coach (or which areas you need to work on), ask your athletes to rate you on a scale of 1-5 (1-2= Low, 3=Moderate, 4-5=Strong) on the following items from the Global Transformational Leadership (GTL) Scale:

My coach:

- (1) Communicates a clear and positive vision of the future,
- (2) Treats me as an individual, supports and encourages my development,
- (3) Gives encouragement and recognition to athletes,
- (4) Fosters trust, involvement, and co-operation among team members,
- (5) Encourages thinking about problems in new ways and questions assumptions,
- (6) Is clear about his/her values and practices what he/she preaches,

(7) Instills pride and respect in others and inspires me by being highly competent.

Transformational coaching inspires athletes trust and a desire to follow your vision for the future. It engenders safety because the athlete knows that they can speak up if they have an idea or don't agree with a coach's plan for them. Research shows that coaches who have a strong level of transformational coaching on the GTL scale have better performing teams. Why is this?

There are several findings from the literature that show the impact on the athlete is higher enjoyment, higher self-efficacy, positive feelings toward sport, reduced time lost from injury, reduced incidence of severe injuries, and extra effort. When athletes are coached by transformational coaches, they are more likely to show up to practice and less likely to be late to practice.

The researchers didn't study why there was less time lost from injury or fewer severe injuries among athletes but hypothesized that reduction in time lost from injury could be because athletes feel safer telling their coaches earlier about any aches or pains and that the coaches are supportive of reducing training volume so that injuries can heal quickly before they get worse. They also hypothesized that transformational coaching reduces athlete stress. When there are higher levels of psychosocial stress, there is higher psychological arousal which increases muscle tension and reduces motor coordination.

But what's in it for the coaches? Transformational coaches are found to be more effective coaches and they report a higher level of satisfaction in the coaching. Fewer athlete injuries, more teamwork, extra effort from the team, and a positive attitude among athletes sounds like a great coaching environment! If you want to learn more about Transformational Leadership, your library or bookstore will have lots of books to help you learn about it. I'll also be presenting on this topic at National Congress 2022 if you're able to join us!

Bartholomew, K, et al. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 2010, 32, 193-216

Ekstrand J, et al. *Br J Sports Med* 2018;52:527-531.

Turnnidge,, J and Côté, J. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 2018;16 (3):327-342.