

Traits of a Successful Coach

by Bill Olsen

Contrary to what people might believe, a consistently successful program does not just depend upon the skills of its athletes, and successful programs are not always composed of superior athletes. Although skilled athletes are certainly a key factor to success, it's evident that there are common traits shared by coaches who oversee successful programs. Here are some key characteristics of a successful coach.

- **KNOWLEDGE SEEKER**

Good coaches are knowledgeable in their sport, but great coaches will continue to pursue additional insights. They often continue to improve their sport-specific knowledge by reading, observing, attending clinics, holding clinics, and in general, exposing themselves to a variety of new ideas. A coach who thinks he/she has nothing more to learn will generally not help their program grow.

- **GOOD ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS**

An effective coach will have training plans for the day, week, year and beyond. Details regarding schedules, transportation, itineraries, and other seemingly ordinary concerns are also the domain of the coach of a smooth running team. Athletes find it frustrating when a coach is unprepared to meet unexpected contingencies, and good coaches prepare for everything.

- **HARD WORKING**

Having a strong work ethic is a quality that can not be overemphasized. Coaches must be willing to put forth as much time and effort as they demand from their athletes. Being prepared to "outwork" competitors by putting in additional time will pay off for a team. Being persistent and tough minded, or having a "bulldog" attitude, is also part of a solid work ethic. A coach who possesses this quality will never give in to failure, and can serve as an inspiration to his/her athletes. The athletes believe they can trust their coach to help them "find a way" to succeed.

- **GOOD COMMUNICATOR**

The ability to communicate effectively with the coaching staff, athletes, parents, and fans is also a trait that most successful coaches possess. The coach must transfer knowledge and technique to his/her athletes and staff. He/she needs to let them know what is expected of them and how they can accomplish their goals. The successful coach also needs to



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communicate and generate support for his/her program. The ability to communicate intangible qualities, such as a positive attitude, enthusiasm, concern, and humor are all keys to success. Enthusiasm is contagious and can rub off on athletes, coaches, and fans. A team is a reflection of the coach, and you can't afford to lose the spark that keeps things moving.

- APPROACHABLE & CARING

Showing athletes that the coach has a human side is also a good idea. A coach should find time to laugh with the athletes and show them he/she has a sense of humor. Being too serious can kill athletes' enthusiasm for the sport. We all know of potentially good athletes who got burned out too early because coaches forgot that sports should be enjoyable. We need to show that we care about our athletes as people and not just as gymnasts. It's good to acknowledge our human qualities, to show that we can make mistakes, but we learn to bounce back and overcome them. Athletes need to believe they can also overcome a fall or bad day and they will, if the coach is willing to demonstrate the same quality.

- HONEST & FAIR

The last and most important trait for a coach to possess is integrity, which is comprised of several components. Loyalty is critically important. As coaches we are part of a big fraternity, and we must stick together, especially in public. Problems and concerns that exist among a coaching staff should remain behind closed doors. We owe our athletes this same loyalty if we want their respect.

Being honest and fair are also components of integrity. Coaches should be up-front and honest with their athletes. Athletes should know their role, and where they stand with the coach and the program. Athletes might not always like what they hear, but they and the program will benefit in the long run if expectations are spelled out early.

The most important commodity the coach possesses is his reputation. Coaches should not comment on a competitor's ethics or coaching ability unless it is in a complimentary manner. This goes beyond loyalty and is an integral part of a coach's philosophy.

Overall, it's the coach who set the tone and leads by example for their athletes. It's how the coach lives and what he/she stands for that athletes will remember in the future. An athlete may not remember a meet where he/she had a fall or the score he/she received, but will remember how the coach handled it. All young people need positive role models, and coaches are often placed in a position to lead by example. It's a large and rewarding opportunity.

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