

13 things about Leadership for the Youth Athlete & their Parents

1) Remember that your personality will change as you get older.

Many psychologists suggest that we all have a core personality, but that our experiences also change who we are over time. You may not be a leader right now, but that doesn't mean you won't become one with guidance and confidence you and your parents can help you instill.

2) Parents: Don't ask your player to be a leader in an unfamiliar environment.

Leadership is linked with self-confidence, and your player will be far more likely to lead in a familiar situation than a novel one. Giving your athlete added responsibilities in a new situation has the potential to make them feel pressured and nervous.

Imagine asking your player to be captain in a sport they have never played before. Compare that with giving them a leadership position in an environment where they are considered knowledgeable or experienced.

3) Encourage them to lead even when not the best player.

Occasionally we all make the mistake of assuming that the best players or performers should be the leaders. This isn't always true. Leadership can be shown through talent, but that doesn't always mean that player has the best voice to reach their teammates. Leadership ties in with motivation, does your child instill motivation in their teammates when they are encouraging them?

4) Let them make decisions for themselves.

It's that simple. Player's should not be worrying about what their parents think about their decisions while playing during training and games. This only stifles confidence and ability to form leadership qualities. Players, don't use having a parent constantly tell you what to do as an excuse. Push through, trust your instincts and be you! To become a leader, players need to be empowered to make their own choices, even if that leads to an occasional failure.

5) Provide decision-making opportunities.

Allow your athlete the opportunity to make decisions, even simple ones. For more complex decisions, work with them to decide what options are available and the pros and cons of each option.

6) Teach them to be ethical and moral.

Research suggests that people are more willing to be led if the leader is conscientious, agreeable, humble, and shows integrity and gratitude. These are traits that can be taught or encouraged. What follower wouldn't want to be encouraged, praised, and be treated fairly

7) Give them leadership opportunities at home.

Find ways to build leadership at home by placing your athlete in positions for leadership and also success (see point 2). It can be things such as cooking a meal or being the leader while playing a board game, for example.

The key is to provide them opportunities to gain experience overseeing or leading others.

8) Encourage academics and reading.

Reading helps to foster imagination and creativity. A good leader sometimes needs to find the answer themselves, and if you have not developed that skill in your over time, it's not going to magically happen.

Reading encourages imagination and allows you to place yourself in the story. It can also help teach values and empathy (see point 6).

9) Let your player fail.

Too often, parents want to jump in and solve a problem for their player when the best thing for them is to let the situation unfold so they can experience failure. Think about it like this: if a player is continually praised, coddled, and protected, what happens when the parent is not there and they have to face reality?

Be supportive during failure, but let your child fail when appropriate, and use it as a teaching moment.

10) Teach perseverance.

A good leader knows that you have to work hard to accomplish your goals and that you just have to keep at it until success is achieved.

11) Teach positivity.

Similar to perseverance, positive thinking can be taught. It requires you to set the example, but also try to reverse negative thinking. "We were horrible compared to that team. They're far more experienced, older, and bigger."

It might be true, and your team might have just experienced a thrashing, but help them find something positive from the situation. It may be the encouragement the team gave each other, the effort that was put in without giving up, or that you had improved a particular aspect of their game from practice.

12) Don't force it.

Not everyone is or should be a leader. Some prefer to be followers and that's perfectly okay. It's important to remember that while you use these points to build leadership skills, it's up to you to determine whether or not you want to lead. If you don't, parents need to accept that and don't push the matter. Later in life you may choose to lead and will then need the skills your parents helped them develop now.

Food for thought:

Do you instill motivation in your teammates when you are encouraging them or addressing something you want them to do better? If not, can we change the delivery to make sure we are reaching our audience? Not every one of your teammates gives and receives information the same. Can you think of an example on your team where two different teammates receive and give information differently in stressful situations at training or in games? How can we help defuse the situation, is it our tone? Is it the timing of the information we give (Ex. I just made a terrible touch and the ball pinged out of bounds instead of keeping possession, and my teammate immediately tells me I needed to pass the ball to them, is the timing right here? Is that going to make my play better the next time I receive the ball)?

Thoughts on ways to improve simple in training and game communication to be a better teammate/leader?

