

The Seven C's of Coaching Credibility

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If you want to build an atmosphere in which everybody pulls together to win, then you as a leader have to recognize that it all starts with you, it starts with your attitude, your commitment, your caring, your passion for excellence, your dedication to winning, It starts with the example you set. It starts with the way you treat and relate to your athletes.

- Pat Williams, Senior Executive Vice President, Orlando Magic

Have you ever wondered why some coaches achieve so much success with their athletes and teams - winning and gaining everyone's respect along the way - while others continually fall short or struggle to get their teams or athletes to perform at a consistently high level? If you are like most coaches, you have probably asked yourself questions such as the following;

- How do some coaches consistently get the most out of their athletes while others have athletes who chronically underachieve?
- How do some coaches gain their athletes' confidence, trust and respect while others have athletes who never buy into them and what they are trying to accomplish?
- How do some coaches inspire their athletes to compete with confidence, aggressiveness and mental toughness while others have athletes who routinely crumble and choke under pressure?
- How do some coaches get athletes to willingly “run through walls” for them while others have athletes with little commitment, no work ethic and bad attitudes?
- How do some coaches inspire a sense of loyalty and pride in their athletes while others have athletes who want to quit, or worse yet instigate a revolt and try to get their coaches fired?

In my work as a sport psychology consultant, I have come to the realization that the most successful coaches are those that not only win most of the time but also are able to develop meaningful relationships with the athletes they coach. In other words their athletes respect them and willingly “put it on the line” for them when asked.

Following are seven characteristics that successful coaches and their athletes have identified as being essential for a coach to have credibility with their athletes and ultimate success. As you read these characteristics, I hope you will honestly examine the way you coach. Ask yourself if there are any areas that need attention.

Remember, you continually ask your athletes to work on aspects of their games that are lacking. It seems to only make sense that you would do the same for yourself if you want to improve.

1. Character - These coaches:

- Do what they say they are going to do. They don't tell athletes one thing and then do another.
- Are honest with athletes regarding their role on the team. They don't promise things they can't deliver.
- Follow the rules as they are written and don't look for ways around those rules to have a better chance to win.

2. Consistent - These coaches:

- Are consistent in the way they administer punishment. They don't show favoritism toward better athletes.
- They don't have a “doghouse.” Disagreements are dealt with and everyone moves on in a productive manner.
- Are consistent in their mood and the way they approach their athletes on a daily basis. They don't take things out on their athletes.
- Create an environment where their athletes know what to expect from them. There are no petty mind games.

3. Communicator - These coaches:

- Make sure their positive/instructive comments outweigh the negative comments.
- Are proactive. They seek out athletes and check in with them instead of waiting for problems to arise.
- Truly have an active, open door.
- Clearly communicate with athletes and staff about roles, expectations and standards. They make no assumptions.
- Focus on really listening to players.
- Seek input from team leaders on key decisions. Athletes feel like they can come and talk to them.

4. Caring - These coaches:

- Act as servants. Athletes feel like the coach would do anything for them regardless of their talent.
- Take a genuine interest in the athletes' lives away from the sport.
- Treat athletes as more than just a group of individuals who can help the coach move up the career ladder.
- Forge long-term relationships with their athletes. There is a sense of loyalty for life.

5. Competent - These coaches:

- Know their sport inside and out, but are also human enough to admit when they are wrong.
- Keep up to date with the latest advances.
- Always learning and willing to look for new ideas.
- Their athletes improve from the time they entered their program to when they finished, no matter how good they were when they started.

6. Committed - These coaches:

- Have a clear vision for the program and are able to communicate that vision to athletes.
- Are passionate/invested. They are committed to putting in the time to be good. They come early and stay late.
- They aren't afraid to list their secrets of success because they know no one will outwork them.
- Have a competitive fire. They are highly competitive individuals.

7. Confidence Builder- These coaches:

- Are inspiring. They sell athletes on themselves. They create and maintain hope and optimism. They also plant seeds of greatness.
- Know that athletes want to feel appreciated, valued, competent and important. Great coaches make athletes feel good about them.
- Realize that confidence is fragile and they are willing to praise athletes in public and criticize in private (never publicly embarrassing them). They catch people doing things right.
- Are appreciative. They share credit with staff, especially acknowledging the “little” people.
- They have the mindset that the athletes are the ones who really win games, not the coach.

Gaining and maintaining respect and credibility with your athletes is vital to ultimate success. Great coaches are great because they see the importance of credibility and respect. They know how fragile they are and work hard to maintain them. Where are you in your journey to becoming one of the great coaches?

In conclusion, I would like you to consider how you want to be remembered by the athletes you coach. Every athlete who competes for you will remember his or her experience with you and your coaching for something. When you think about it, your coaching career is relatively short in the whole scheme of life, Whether you are involved for a few years or dedicate much of your life coaching, the time you have available to impact people is relatively short.

Essentially your career is the “dash” between your first and last day of coaching (e.g., 1995–2035). It's an

inch. It is very short, Therefore, it is imperative that you invest your time wisely and determine what you will do with the "dash" you have been given. How are you going to coach during those years? What legacy would you like to leave behind after you are gone? What would you want the important people in your life to say about you when celebrating your career at your retirement banquet? The poem below seems appropriate when thinking about your legacy. ®

References

This article is based on the book: Janssen, J. & Dale, G, (2002). The seven secrets of successful coaches: How to unlock and unleash your team's full potential. Tucson, AZ: Winning the Mental Game.

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How You Live Your Dash

I heard of a man who stood to speak
At the retirement banquet of a coaching friend.
He referred to the dates of the coach's career
From the beginning... to the end.

He noted the first and last day of the coach's time
And spoke the dates with tears.
But he said what mattered most of all
Was the dash between those years.

For that dash represents all the time
That he spent coaching on earth.
And now only those who loved and played for him
Know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not how much we win;
The trophies... the records... the cash,
What matters most is how we live and love
And how we spend or dash.

So think about this long and hard...
Are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left
That can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough
To consider what's true and real
And always try to understand
The way our athletes feel.

And be less quick to anger
And show appreciation more
And love the people in our lives
Like we've never loved before.

If we treat our athletes with respect
And more often wear a smile,
Remembering that this special dash
Might only last awhile.

So, when your coaching career comes to an end
With your life's actions to rehash...
Would you be proud of the things your athletes say
About how you spent your dash?

*Adapted for coaches by Jeff Janssen and Greg Dale
from "the Dash." A poem by Linda Ellis
of Linda's Lyrics <http://www.lindaslyrics.com>*