

5 TIPS FOR BUILDING A STRONG RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A COACH AND AN ATHLETE

A team's success is largely measured by its season record; however, successful coaches understand that forming strong coach-athlete relationships is just as important as achieving wins. Establishing relationships with athletes helps a coach understand what motivates or drives each individual. It also highlights a personal, caring approach on the part of the coach—demonstrating that the coach sees the player as more than just a ticket to victory. Creating a relationship with each athlete helps improve overall team morale in addition to helping ensure the team will accomplish its goals.

Yet there are other benefits associated with creating strong coach-athlete relationships. For example, athletes may find they can communicate their frustrations and their ideas with the coach, and in turn, the coach can create a better strategy through understanding the athletes.

The ability to create coach-team relationships is a unique skill that coaches must develop. It takes problem-solving, patience, understanding, and mutual trust—and it is the coach who must lead the way in creating intra-team bonds.

There are several skills coaches can develop that can help them form strong ties with their athletes. Examples include communication skills, an ability to use positive reinforcement, the ability to gain trust, and a willingness to make themselves available to athletes who need advice or encouragement.

1. Communication

One of the most important aspects of the relationship between coach and athlete is communication. With clear communication, coaches can lead, direct, and manage their teams more effectively. In return, the team and individual athletes can both freely express ideas and concerns to the benefit of everyone.

Coaches must consider every situation and every athlete individually to decide the best form of communication. Although a democratic style of coaching is usually the best strategy, an autocratic style can also have its advantages.

Autocratic coaching is known for telling instead of listening and can be advantageous when concrete trust is present. Democratic coaching, on the other hand, is a style where the coach and individual athletes communicate openly and have collaborative discussions.

Communication is a crucial element of a good coach-athlete relationship. Without it, coaches may find their athletes won't listen as readily. They may also notice a lack of cohesion throughout the team.



2. Positive Reinforcement

Building an athlete up through positive support and encouragement can help them accomplish their personal goals and support the team constructively. Coaches who help their teams visualize a positive outcome can increase the team's chances of achieving success.

Coaches don't need to be positive about every aspect to accomplish their goals. They can acknowledge where their athletes are doing well, along with showing them where they need improvement. It's important to note that positive reinforcement hinges on effective communication. One of the coach's responsibilities is to help their players grow as athletes, as well as help them gain confidence in their skills both on and off the field.

Coaches may find that with positive reinforcement, their players will find their own inner-motivation and continue to improve individually. A team that is self-motivated can rise above challenges and find success.

3. Genuine Interest

For a coach to gain the respect of their athletes, they must give respect in return. To create a strong relationship, coaches must show an interest that goes beyond immediate team-related issues. For example, people often react positively when someone remembers what their passions are.

The difference between demonstrating interest and genuine interest is sincerity. A coach with genuine interest will gather information about players that may help with game strategy, practice, and general team bonding.

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4. Availability

The relationship between coach and athlete depends on how to open the coach is to establishing interpersonal relationships. As a mentor and advisor, the coach needs to make clear to the entire team that he or she is available to talk whenever needed. Younger student-athletes often need advice and at times, maybe seeking someone to follow. By being available and engaged, coaches have an opportunity to positively influence their athletes. Coaches who make themselves available to their athletes are paving the way toward establishing and nurturing strong relationships.

5. Trust

Trust is the cornerstone of a strong bond, and it is formed when a coach provides clear instructions, delivers positive reinforcement, and shows genuine interest. Once trust is established, athletes usually listen more closely, follow instructions more readily, and generally enjoy the entire team experience more intently. Mutual trust is beneficial to the team, to how athletes play their sports, and it often leads to positive results.





OTHER TIPS FOR FORMING POSITIVE COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIPS

Although coaches hold a position of authority, they must also make sure their athletes see them as reachable, and as a role model or mentor. The challenge of coaching is balancing rational logic along with empathy and emotional awareness. A strong relationship between coach and athlete is important not only for the athlete's growth as a positive, ethical and moral person but for the team's performance as a whole.

1. Develop Positive Relationship Skills

Coaches who focus on creating effective, personal relationships with their athletes are likely to see benefits regardless of the team's wins because they will have helped build positive moral and ethical behaviors. Through strong relationships and a holistic approach to coaching, young athletes develop as people and play better as a team.

The skills that effective coaches possess revolve around honesty and positivity. They must accept, support, and respect their athletes as well as the people around them. They must realize that being a role model is a 24/7 job. Approachable and interested coaches will attract players, both those interested in a relationship and those who don't know if they want one.

If coaches are willing to create relationships but are unsure of how to begin, they can try a few simple methods. They can host team events outside of the athletic program, such as a meal or fun activity during the weekend. It gives the athletes an opportunity to connect with their coach outside the usual relationship structure.

2. Focus on Developing Effective, Successful Coach-Athlete Relationships

When an individual is lifted up, the team is lifted up. Genuine relationships between athletes and coaches generate more trust, better communication, and a winning attitude. An open line of communication helps everyone be more honest with one another, which leads to stronger training, athletic progress, and personal growth. Winning will become a byproduct of the relationships the team and coach have created.

Achieving victories, success, and goals are possible without relationships, but that approach has significant drawbacks. Coaches can become remote and distant, and players can adopt a "win at any cost" attitude that is characterized by selfishness and poor sportsmanship. By promoting a positive competitive environment, athletes can have the opportunity for tremendous personal growth both on and off the field.

3. Be Aware of Negative Relationship Characteristics

The coach-athlete relationship is considered particularly crucial because of its effect on the athlete. Young athletes are susceptible to their surrounding environment and to the ideas of others, making the coach-athlete relationship critical to the development of athletes as individuals as well as sports participants. If a coach is exclusively focused on victory and their sole goal is winning, they may be able to reach that goal. However, it comes with the strong possibility of introducing ethical and professional dilemmas.

Success without effective relationships produces athletes with ability, but with no personal growth. Coaches must understand their job isn't just about physical progress, it's about equipping their young athletes for success in life. A lack of interest, remoteness, deceit, and pessimism are key characteristics to avoid as a coach. Apathy and irritability set a poor example and lead to ineffective relationships.

These characteristics do not provide a healthy foundation for positive relationships, furthermore, they exploit the impressionable minds of athletes who are focused on pursuing victories on the field. The real victories are found in teamwork and personal connections.