

Management & Leadership of a High School Team

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As a coach and role model, you will affect the lives of your riders. Through your approach to coaching, you will show your riders how to deal with many of the challenges they will face in life. You must have a “philosophy” that you can apply and communicate to others. You must commit to it and be ready to define and defend it.

Most certainly mistakes will be made along the way but as long as people can recognize your genuineness to learn and to be fair to all team members, you will not fail. In general a coach's first priority should be in determining how they are going to interact with their team and how they wish for the team to interact with them, but most importantly, each other. Below is a summary of the elements of my coaching philosophy that I hope helps you refine why and how you coach.

Take Delight in Young People: Liking kids has to be a priority. Your primary reason for coaching should be to help young people grow, mature and develop into successful, well rounded and respected adults. Of course we all want to win, but if winning is the only thing that counts, you'll never have the pride and satisfaction that comes from your riders succeeding at life.

You have to coach for the right reasons. You must focus on teaching your riders proper values. Important values to teach include discipline, hard work, conquering fear and tension, having pride in their selves, their teammates, their bikes, establishing attainable goals, and more importantly striving to accomplish those goals.

Don't coach for the wrong reasons, such as boosting your ego or wanting to be in the limelight. Don't use your riders to fan your ego because then they become pawns instead of people.

Safety: The coach assumes the responsibility of doing everything possible to ensure that the riders on his or her team will have an enjoyable and safe sporting experience. Teach the riders and volunteers how to inspect their equipment before each ride and make sure each rider has the proper equipment and clothes. Set a high standard and don't let riders learn bad habits (e.g., showing up for practice with a filthy bike or under-dressed on a cold day). Make sure that you and all volunteers have emergency medical information for each rider during every practice. All volunteers must know what to do if there is a medical emergency; how to respond, who to call, etc. All ride leaders should carry a cell phone, walkie-talkies, first aid kits, change to use pay phones, etc.

Leadership: As the coach, you have assumed a position of leadership and, thus, you must not be afraid to take authority...with kids, parents, and assistants. You set the standard. You set the bar. You follow through on expectation and, as a result, the kids will learn to do the same.

Organization: You won't be able to accomplish everything that you want to accomplish if you don't have a concrete, workable plan. Every practice is a race against time, don't waste a minute. Determine what you want to accomplish for each practice in order to obtain your team goals. Your assistants must understand your plan and how you want the fundamentals to be taught. You must also listen to input from your assistants/parents and be willing to take their suggestions under consideration. This should be done before practice so that no time is wasted.

Enthusiasm: Enthusiasm is a necessity whether you are on a ride or talking with a rider at the high school. The thought of working with your riders should motivate you and get you excited about what they are accomplishing. You should treat every rider as if they were Alison Dunlap or Todd Wells and every practice as if it were the last game of the World Series.

Patience: The ability to go over things again and again, never losing enthusiasm is a must for a solid coach. Every great athlete had a mentor who had the patience to teach the fundamentals of the sport. One of the greatest experiences of coaching is to see the least talented suddenly blossom, all because you never gave up on the rider. The riders will not forget how they became successful and will take the same values into their lives.

Persistence: It is difficult to differentiate between patience and persistence; they go hand in hand for a coach. You must persist and you must teach your kids to persist. Persistence in simple words, is never giving up. Each of us has failed at times but what is more important than failure is what we do after we fail. The greatest thing about defeat is that it is a powerful learning tool. A good coach will always reach for the positive in all situations. They will not attempt to turn their team members into what they think they should be, but rather, to help them in realizing their full value to themselves and the team for what they already are.

Sincerity: You must be sincerely concerned about your riders, first as human beings and second as riders. Being concerned, listening as well as teaching and sharing decision making will empower you riders to do their best. Sincerity and concern mean that the race and its outcome are secondary to the people riding in it. A poor coach will view their team as nothing more than subjects to dictate to. A poor coach will have difficulty in communicating with the team and all others.

Fairness: Being fair goes along with sincerity and concern. Everyone wants a fair chance to do what they can do. They want an opportunity! Never discuss one of your rider's abilities with another rider on the team. Make only positive comments during and after practice and races. Never single out one player to praise. I try to keep a list during the race and write down as many positive things that a rider has done that I can find. After the race I will go through the list and state a couple of things that each rider did that helped the team.

Team Building: The coach should be focused on creating a team. Develop a sense of belonging, camaraderie, and commitment among the riders. Encourage group activities, such as team dinners, volunteering for community projects (e.g., trail repairs), and bi-weekly team meetings. Teach your riders about responsibility, coming to practice and races on time and ready to ride hard. Encourage team members to write articles for the school paper to help get the word out.

Inclusiveness: Kids on your team will undoubtedly come from a wide range of backgrounds (socioeconomic, cultural, etc.) and a good coach will strive to make everyone comfortable. Some kids will may high-end bikes while others may have bikes that won't survive the first off-road ride. You must help the kids that don't have the resources or equipment to help them feel comfortable and remain safe on their rides.

Academics: Riding on the team is a privilege that should only be allowed if the student is performing in the classroom. Ask parents to monitor academic progress and provide you with updates if necessary.

Parent / Sponsor / Volunteer Involvement: In order to build the best support network possible, a good coach will strive to involve as many volunteers and sponsors as possible. To this end, make your needs known and don't be afraid to ask parents to help. It is a good idea to check in with volunteers regularly and to reward volunteers with whatever you can (team jerseys, inclusion in pro orders, etc.). Also, look to build local sponsorship of the team and provide the sponsors with regular updates on the team's progress.