

The most powerful force on any team is the personal character of the athletes and coaches. Personal character matters because it is the foundation of trust. Teams that trust each other play harder, smarter, quicker, tougher, and more together than teams that lack trust. Most importantly, teams with strong character stick together during difficult times. Consequently, teams with strong personal character win when they should and often upset teams with superior physical talent. Here are ten winning practices you can use to elevate your team with your own personal character.

1. Show Spirit

Competitive spirit is a winning combination of energy and enthusiasm. Athletes who have it like to play the game. They are able to get themselves pumped up and positive even when things are tough. Athletes with spirit are especially valuable because they inspire everyone around them to elevate their own spirit of competition.

2. Show Intensity

Intensity is the desire to strive for excellence. Athletes with intensity know what they want to accomplish. They show up every day with a strong work ethic. They go hard in team practice, individual workouts, and competition. They do not let distractions get in the way of their goals. The tougher it gets out there, the more they love it.

3. Show Courage

Courage is the will to do the right thing even in the face of fear. Physical courage is the will to push your body to the limit. Emotional courage is the will to take a risk even if you might fail. And moral courage is the will to keep your integrity no matter what. Trusted athletes show all three **kinds of courage**.

4. Show Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from a setback. Every athlete has setbacks. Losses, slumps, illness, injury, and plain old bad days happen to everyone. But you can make a decision to be resilient, which is simply a decision to always get back up no matter what. Your teammates and coaches will trust you and respect you all the more when they see you rise up after a fall.

5. Show Integrity

Integrity is a combination of honesty, ethics, and reliability. Athletes with integrity tell the truth. They refuse to cheat. If they say they will do something, they do it. For obvious reasons, integrity is essential for earning the trust of your teammates.

6. Show Respect

Respect means treating people with courtesy and consideration. It is a simple virtue which is too often forgotten. Respectful athletes always take a moment to make sure they

listen and speak to people with respect. This earns them trust, especially during challenging conversations.

"Look for players with character and ability. But remember, character comes first." - Joe Gibbs, Head Coach, Washington Redskins.

7. Show Responsibility

Responsibility means fulfilling your duties to the team. It means showing up for workouts and competitions on time and prepared to perform. It also means managing schoolwork and other important priorities along with athletics. Responsible athletes earn trust because their teammates know they can depend on them to deliver.

8. Show Service

There are two kinds of athletes when it comes to service: me-first and team-first. Me-first athletes believe it is the job of their teammates and coaches to serve them. Team-first athletes believe it is their job to serve their teammates and coaches. Team-first athletes earn trust.

9. Show Loyalty

It is one thing to serve the team when things are going well. It is quite another thing to serve the team when things are going south. Loyalty means sticking with your team during difficult times. Loyal athletes earn the trust of their teammates.

10. Show Honor

Honor is the practice of holding the team in very high regard – and acting accordingly. This means representing the team well in competition. It also means representing the team well in school and the broader community. Honorable athletes never do anything to dishonor themselves or their team.

Elevation (For reflection and discussion)

1. Why do you think Joe Gibbs (see quote) advises coaches to look for character before ability?
2. Do you agree that personal character is the most important force on a team? Why or why not?
3. Which of the ten winning practices are you already doing? Which ones need more attention?
4. How can the ten winning practices help you outside of sports?
5. Can you give an example of someone on your team or in your community who is a good role model of personal character? Which winning practices do they show?