

How to Be a Positive Team Leader

An Elevation Guide from www.ElevatingAthletes.net

The most successful teams have athletes who provide positive leadership. Sometimes they are team captains. Sometimes they are leading performers. And sometimes the best leaders are role players who might not even get much playing time.

The job of a team leader is this: *Elevate the team and inspire others to do the same.* Your coaches will provide the overall direction for the team. Your job is to execute what the coaches want and help your teammates do the same. In addition, your job is to keep your teammates inspired and focused in the right direction.

Here are ten things you can do to be a positive team leader every day. These are certainly not the only things you can do to help your team as a leader - but they are an excellent start!

1. Think Team First

The first job of a team leader is to think about the team before the self. Ask yourself: 'What can I do to help my team succeed?' If you are not sure, ask your coach. Then do what it takes to elevate your team.

2. Model the Way

We cannot expect to lead others if we cannot first lead ourselves. And we cannot expect others do to what we will not do. Model the way with what you do and say every day. And treat your teammates the same respect and trust you expect from them.

3. Assure Execution

Effective team leaders first make sure they can execute their own assignments. Then they help their teammates execute theirs. Sometimes this happens with a quick word of instruction during practice or competition. Sometimes more effort is needed, like taking time to help a teammate outside of practice. Always be ready to help a teammate learn how to execute their job.

4. Drive the Energy

Every team goes through periods where their 'emotional tank' is either empty or overflowing. When the tank is empty, the team has trouble mustering the intensity, pride, and enthusiasm the athletes need to play their best. When the tank is overflowing, the team is so emotionally wired it cannot execute its fundamental tasks. Use your voice and example to direct the team energy where it needs to be.

5. Focus the Goals

Your team most likely has a set of goals for the season. The problem is, teams have a tendency to 'lose their focus' during the course of a season. Make sure you know what your team goals are. Then use your voice to remind your teammates about what you want to accomplish as a team.

6. Spread the Values

Teams usually have a set of team values which define the *kind* of team they aspire to be. For example, one coach always wanted his teams to 'play hard, play smart, play

tough, and have fun.' If your team is losing its focus or motivation, remind your teammates of your team values – especially during difficult practices or contests.

"Talent is important. But the single most important ingredient after you get the talent is internal leadership."
Mike Krzyzewski, Duke University Men's Basketball

7. Build Team Unity

Many teams suffer from a lack of unity. This often happens when cliques are formed and some athletes are left out. Your job as a leader is to make sure that every team member feels included and valued as a part of the team. Send the message that whatever differences people may have outside the team, inside the lines it is one team with one goal.

8. Encourage the Heart

At any given time there is usually someone on a team who is struggling. It might be injury, illness, lack of playing time, or personal problems. It is not the job of a team leader to solve everyone else's problems. But you should look out for your teammates and offer a word of encouragement to anyone who is feeling down.

9. Confront Challenges

Every team has its share of challenges – from injury, to illness, to losing, to personality conflicts. Effective team leaders are able to confront these challenges in ways that build trust. If your team is struggling with a serious challenge which you think needs attention, work with your teammates and coaches to confront the challenge and come up with a solution.

10. Celebrate Accomplishments

Teams need motivation to keep getting better, and one of the best ways to provide motivation is to celebrate team accomplishments. Of course you should celebrate team victories. But also celebrate those accomplishments which are not captured on the scoreboard – even something as small as getting through a really difficult practice session. The celebrations need not be anything elaborate – just a short celebration within the locker room can do wonders to elevate your team!

Elevation (For reflection and discussion)

1. Check out the quote from Coach K. Why do you think he places so much value on team leadership?
2. Which of the ten winning practices are you already doing? Which ones need more attention?
3. How can the ten winning practices help you outside of sports?
4. Can you give an example of someone on your team or in your community who is a positive team leader? Which winning practices do they show?