

Are You Coaching Your Staff?

by Deborah D. Ludwig

Successful coaches have two winning coaching traits. They constantly evaluate their players and communicate their strengths and weaknesses to them. Good coaches take responsibility for developing each team member; they want their players to be the best they can be. Successful coaches produce winning teams!

Now ask yourself, as a center director, am I responsible for developing my staff? Is it my job to evaluate and communicate to my employees? Do I want my staff to be the best they can be? Of course you do — the role of a director is very similar to the role of a coach. Directors want good employees performing at their peak potential. Coaches expect the same from their players. Managers desire employees that are self-motivated, self-disciplined, and take initiative. Coaches also dream of a “perfect” team.

It would seem that both managers and coaches have a lot in common. Therefore, it appears reasonable to suggest that certain coaching skills and techniques are closely related to good supervisory skills and techniques. Constantly observing, objectively evaluating, and effectively communicating to employees are the foundations of every successful working relationship. Coaches understand how important these efforts are.

Good coaches dedicate a great deal of time to learn their players’ strengths and weaknesses. The most respected coaches and directors possess the ability to observe their players or staff fairly, consistently, and objectively. Coaches spend a significant amount of time observing each individual player.

Good coaches develop a high level of understanding of each player’s capabilities. They know if an individual’s performance is below expectations, or if the player is having an “off day.” Or, perhaps, additional development and training are needed for the player to become successful. Likewise, astute directors know when additional training is needed or when a caregiver simply needs a reminder.

Good coaches practice being friendly to their players as opposed to being their friend. They are aware of the power of perception. Good coaches work hard to ensure no favoritism is shown, on or off the field. They

understand how the wrong message can affect the morale of the team, and can obstruct the team from attaining their goals. All good coaches and good directors only ask or expect from their team what they ask or expect from themselves. They take their roles seriously and understand how influential they can be in their players’ lives.

Good coaches are approachable. Staff members need to feel their director is approachable as well. Empathic, active listening skills are critical qualities of good coaches and good directors. Knowing how to respond appropriately with sensitivity and genuine sincerity will help your team develop their own acceptable means of responding. There are times when good coaches need to act as facilitators within the framework of the team. Knowing how much or how little to say can help others learn and develop problem solving skills of their own.

Sometimes effective communication means confronting others with unpleasant observations. Good coaches meet this challenge with directness, wasting no time with covertness or procrastination. Dealing with the situation as soon as possible, and with open and honest

communication, is the most effective solution. Waiting until a formal evaluating time frame is not an effective coaching trait. Good communication exists when players are not surprised by the coach's comments or decisions. Likewise, when staff are being effectively coached by their director, they already know the results of their evaluation before their review. As a result, ongoing and continuous feedback improves the players and the team.

Good coaches exert a lot of time, energy, and dedication to their players. They have one objective . . . to win the game. Good directors exert a lot of time, energy, and dedication to their staff. Effective directors use good coaching techniques to develop and help their staff grow professionally. Good directors have one important objective . . . to have the best qualified, trained, and educated staff. When this objective is attained, the real winners are the children.

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