



Promoting Self Discipline in Your Athletes

The following are excerpts from an article on Self-Discipline © 2005 About, Inc. Vol. 7 No. 13 - ISSN: 1533-3698 February 17, 2006. The sections were edited for sports context.

Be honest with yourself and work on the ones in which you are weakest. Focus on the good habits and soon enough they will replace the bad habits. There is no lasting coaching success without self-discipline. But, once you become familiar with the characteristics of the self-disciplined high achiever, you'll be able to adapt your own coaching to include these positive values.

Enjoy and please pass along to other coaches...

Mike Lichtenberger

PROMOTE SELF-DISCIPLINE TO ENHANCE YOUR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.

Coaches expect a level of self-discipline among their players and coaching staff. This is achieved through growth and development – along with the opportunity to demonstrate maturity and self-control – among your student athletes. Coaches can no longer be strict disciplinarians. Student athletes do not want coaches “on their backs.” Promoting self-discipline is, of course, an art form that must be practiced. Expect give-and-take from your athletes and staff and regard your experiences as a learning segment in your career.

- **Making your expectations clear.** Athletes, and especially student-athletes, need to know exactly what is expected from them. If you want to see continuous skill improvement, improved team play, initiative or even off-ice problem solving, let them know what you expect. You want to encourage some flexibility so present the basic requirement for them in terms of skill development, gaining additional knowledge or participation in new [positive] learning experiences. In addition, spend time with new athletes who do not see much competitive game time. Explain to them what is important to you and the organization. It is time well-invested.
- **Praising initiative and self-discipline in action - fan the flame!** Praise the individual and offer continued support to make sure their ideas / actions are implemented. Tell the person how much you appreciate their contribution and that you hope their contributions will continue. Reward the person in ways that are important to the individual. Consider options such as more playing time, assignment to special teams, role as captain or similar leadership role, or a training and personal development opportunity.

- **Treating your athletes as if they are adults, which they are!** Think about how adults want to be treated. They want minimal rules and guidelines, only the policies necessary to ensure an ordered, fair, consistent competitive environment. They may want to provide input about decisions that involve themselves or their team. They want to be treated with respect. They want the game to provide more than just ice time...they want their opportunity. Playing for a team contributes to their social needs; most athletes want to feel as if they are contributing to something greater than themselves. The best teams and successful programs promote individual and group success and raise the self-esteem of players and coaches.
- **Applying team policies and rules to all athletes.** Solicit input from your senior players before establishing a new policy. Try to gauge their reaction to potential new guidelines. Ask them how the rules might vary within the team – say, between class year or high performers – yet being careful not to create a disparate environment. Remember that certain rules are not negotiable. Set the critical few deal breakers as absolute policy – then stay consistent - e.g., student athletes and alcohol; hazing, etc. versus missing a practice for an obligation outside of the sport
- **Making your practices a safe place for athletes to try out new ideas.** Make every effort to ensure players are not "punished" or ridiculed when an idea fails to work as intended. Provide an opportunity for players to be creative and take risks.
- **Spending time meeting with players and coaches regularly.** Formal or informal – ask them how they think you are doing. Ask them if they can do something different to achieve their desired results. Encourage initiative and action....there is no need to fear losing control if you delegate.....
- **Knowing what is going on with the players and coaches on your team.** After all you are the coach so use these skills to encourage the development of each person on your team. When a player or coach asks you what to do, or how to approach an issue, ask him/her what he/she thinks is best.
- **Encouraging open communication between yourself and the players / coaches on the team.** Communicate all the information that is available about your team...your players [protect privacy, but celebrate successes], your competition, the league, and your mission and vision. Restate the organization's overall goals. The more people know, the more they can act independently to help you.
- **Since teams are made up of human beings, occasionally players will not practice self-discipline.** In these instances, address unacceptable behavior immediately. Almost nothing lowers the morale of your contributing student-athletes more quickly than seeing inappropriate conduct or behavior go uncorrected.

Best wishes and thanks for being a coach!

"Remember, there is nothing wrong in believing in your dreams!"