

A Coach's Guide to Developing Self-Esteem

INTRODUCTION

Individual and team performance is directly related to how an athlete feels about him/herself. Your athletes will learn faster, perform better and have fewer performance problems when you help them feel good about themselves.

STEP ONE

TREAT ATHLETES WITH RESPECT

Deal with your athletes the way that you would like to be dealt with. Respect them and they will end up respecting you. If they respect you, they will be able to learn from you and will go to the ends of the earth to perform for you. Humiliate and/or demean them on a regular basis and ultimately they will end up fearing you and hating the sport.

STEP TWO

AVOID COMPARISONS

All too often coaches make the mistake of comparing athletes on the same team. Comparisons almost always make athletes feel badly and engender intrasquad rivalries and unhealthy competition. If you're going to compare, do so only to model (i.e., "Look at the way Janice executes that trick... especially watch what she does with her upper body... that's what we want you to do").

STEP THREE

DEAL WITH YOUR ATHLETES AS WHOLE PEOPLE

If you take an interest in your athlete beyond his/her athletic abilities you will go a long way toward making that athlete feel special. If an athlete knows that you care about them as a person, not just for what they can do for you or the team, they will "reward" you with high intensity, increased motivation and peak performances.

STEP FOUR

DO NOT EQUATE YOUR ATHLETES' SELF-ESTEEM WITH THEIR PERFORMANCES

When your athletes have bad performances or "let you down" they are not less of a person. What they need from you most is a self-esteem boost, not a self-esteem assault. Athletes that know that their coach will respond negatively when they fail will suffer from continuous performance problems.

STEP FIVE

CHALLENGE YOUR ATHLETES, DON'T THREATEN THEM

When you really want your athletes to stretch themselves and push to that next level, challenge them! Encourage them to go for it and let them know that you believe they can do it. A challenge is a positive way to interact with them. It raises their self-esteem. A threat is negative and entails a punishment. Threats potentially diminish self-esteem and will set up the wrong kind of relationship with them.

STEP SIX

VIEW YOUR ATHLETES' PERSONAL PROBLEMS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP A BETTER RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM

When your athletes bring personal problems to the gym, court or field don't view this as a hassle and interference to your coaching. Instead, see this as a chance to get to know the athlete better and to help him/her in a significant, personal way. If you approach their difficulties this way you'll automatically raise their self-esteem.

STEP SEVEN

COMMUNICATE

Be open, direct and honest in your communications to your athletes. Let them know clearly how you feel and what is going on. If you are angry or upset with an athlete's behavior, let them know directly. Do not expect that they should "read your mind". Communicate directly with them and they will do so with you.

STEP EIGHT

LISTEN

The heart of effective communication is listening. The way to make an athlete feel better about him/herself is to listen to them when they speak to you. Listening communicates caring on your part and will make an athlete feel better about themselves. So the next time they speak, do not plan out in your head how you will respond. Be silent both outside and inside and just listen.

STEP NINE

BE EMPATHIC

There is nothing that makes you feel good about yourself as much as knowing that someone you respect understands you. Step into your athletes' shoes when they come to you with their problems. View the world from their perspective not yours. If you let them know that you understand what it's like to be in their shoes you'll make them feel cared about and valued. Communication with empathy is a key tool to raise self-esteem in your athletes.

STEP TEN USE RECOGNITION

Recognition is one of the most powerful motivators there is and another important way that you can get your athletes feeling better about themselves. Every day let your athletes know that you know that they are there. Even simple comments like, "good effort", "nice job", "how to hustle" or "good to see you today" go a long way to make your athletes feel good about working with you. Sometimes all it takes is a simple pat on the back for you to help turn around an athlete's day.

STEP ELEVEN

BE POSITIVE

Nothing good comes from negativity. Positive coaching is much more effective than negative coaching. Consistently getting down on your athletes will not make them feel good about you or themselves and it certainly won't inspire them to greatness. Negativity will bring you and everyone around you down. Be positive no matter what. Display a positive attitude and you'll find that it becomes catchy.

STEP TWELVE

HANDLE FAILURES, SETBACKS AND MISTAKES CONSTRUCTIVELY

Teach your athletes that failures and mistakes are a necessary part of the learning process and not a cause for embarrassment and humiliation. Model this attitude and you will teach your athletes to take risks and really go for it. If you jump in an athlete's face whenever they mess up

you are not only assaulting their self-esteem, but teaching them that they should worry about making mistakes.

STEP THIRTEEN

PRAISE THE INDIVIDUAL, CRITICIZE THE GROUP

When an athlete messes up, do not single that player out for humiliation in front of the group. Teach the whole group that when you are in that particular situation, you do not want an athlete doing such-an-such (you demonstrate without naming names). If an athlete does something well, single him/her out by name in front of the group for praise, ("In this situation, I want you to handle things just like Bill did"). If you feel the need to criticize an individual do it in private.

STEP FOURTEEN

MODEL HIGH SELF-ESTEEM

If you want your athletes to feel good about themselves be sure that you act and present yourself in such away that speaks of high self-esteem. This does NOT mean that you should go around in an uppity or condescending manner. It does mean that you should act like you value yourself.

STEP FIFTEEN

DO NOT CONDONE DEMEANING BEHAVIOR ON THE TEAM

Do not allow an athlete or his/her teammates to put themselves or anyone else down. You do not want to collude with anyone's low self-esteem by allowing that behavior to go on unchecked.