



**FELLOWSHIP OF
CHRISTIAN ATHLETES
BASEBALL**



Over the years, I have learned it doesn't matter how much I know about baseball; what matters is if I can transfer what I know to my players. I don't know how many times I have thought to myself "I can only teach them, I can't do it for them"; "Why are they not doing what I covered with them?" Or "how many practices or reps do they need until they get this right?"

Maybe it is not them.

Chances are.... it's me.

I think we would all agree communication is a key. But more importantly, the transferring of our knowledge to enable a player to make a change to grow and develop is even more paramount.

We as Christian Coaches probably believe that God has given us the gift of leadership and teaching. By gifting us, He also expects us to work on these gifts (Philippians 2:12).

Through research and years of experience (and mostly through costly mistakes I have made), I have found twelve competencies that a Leader will want to have in order to maximize transferal of knowledge and to give himself the best chance to succeed in leadership. On the baseball field or in the corporate America, I hope these competencies can be of some help.

Leadership Competencies

1. Maintain or Enhance Self Esteem

It is important for young people to feel that they are vital members of the team, and that their views are valuable to you as well as the team. Maintaining or enhancing self-esteem helps you create an environment in which team members are likely to communicate openly. This translates to a culture where problems and issues are talked about and not swept under the carpet only to manifest itself at the worst possible times.

A Leader who maintains or enhances self-esteem:

- Acknowledges and praises others ideas or suggestions regardless of contribution.
- Identifies and compliments a player's achievements (no matter how small) and helps instill confidence in that player.
- Expresses confidence in a player's ability to learn and apply new concepts and skills.
- Avoids actions or statements that lower a person's self-worth or demean his or her ability.

Your challenge – This week when a player blurts out an idea (regardless of if it would contribute or not) – walk them through the process of what they said and identify the outcomes of that idea. Just make sure not to be patronizing. Something like “Johnny thanks for the suggestion! Let’s flush out that idea. What would happen if we did _____? Could that help us achieve _____? How so? What other alternatives you can think of? Would they be better?”

2. Listen and Respond with Empathy

Players experience a variety of feelings (excitement, confusion, disappointment, apprehension etc.) during a game or intense situations. Players who believe that their emotions are not taken seriously tend to become defensive or withdraw from discussions or activities. Even if you disagree with someone’s point of view, it is important to listen and respond with empathy. This lets the player know you understand their feelings and concerns.

When a player expresses concerns or negative feelings, you can prevent a situation from getting worse by acknowledging the issue before it gets in the way of learning. Usually, just showing that you understand the player’s feelings will prevent them from being hostile, defensive or withdrawing from the group. The best way to listen and respond with empathy is to respond to both the facts of the situation and the person’s feelings.

A Leader who listens and responds with empathy:

- Listens to comments and questions without interrupting.
- Identifies both fact and feeling – meaning both the situation causing the concern and the feelings being expressed.
- Shows that he understands the player’s concerns by identifying and labeling the feelings expressed and restating what was said/done.

Your challenge – This week look to identify when a player is experiencing an emotion and then label it while expressing concern. For example – after an error you could say something like “Johnny I know you want to field every groundball; it is frustrating when we miss one. And I understand that because I wanted to field every one as well. We both know that even the pros don’t field every one. Let’s work on the process of getting the footwork and getting the glove work right. If we focus on this, it will help us field most of the ground balls we get.”

3. Ask for help and Encourage Involvement

Players learn best when they are engaged and involved in the subject. Yet some players are naturally reserved or don’t share your interest and passion for a particular subject. A good Leader looks to involve everyone in the learning process by encouraging participation so that team members contribute enabling them to learn from your knowledge and experiences.

A Leader who asks for help and encourages involvement:

- Inspires players to share ideas and experiences that apply to the concepts they are learning creating better “buy-in”.
- Asks everyone to participate in solving problems and addressing concerns.

- Selects players to participate in activities in which they can be effective while making sure to reinforce their contributions.

Your challenge – This week look for players who seem not to contribute during team on the field huddles and discussions. Ask them for their help in solving a problem or what to do next. You can even ask them what specific areas they think the team needs to work on (i.e. batting, fielding etc.).

4. Share Thoughts, Feelings and Rationale

Disclosing information or motivations helps players understand the “why” behind a decision or action and also helps validate their sense of self-esteem. When sharing rationale, provide the information the players need to make a sound judgement. Players are more likely to commit to a course of action when they know the reason behind it.

A Leader who shares thoughts, feelings and rationale:

- Is honest and gets honesty in return.
- Admits when he makes a mistake. Also, isn't afraid to admit he may not have the answer.
- Expresses personal feelings openly (not necessarily personal aspects or his life); but can discuss sensitive issues and encourages others to do the same.
- Provides feedback and asks for feedback on his behavior.

Your challenge – This week look for an opportunity to let the team know you have made mistakes. Even tell a story of a mistake you made and how it affected the outcome of something. But don't do it in a way that you are teaching them a lesson – do it in a way to show your vulnerability. Look for more ways to be transparent with them.

Just like working on the mechanics of a swing or fielding a ground ball, these competencies need to be practiced to be mastered. I suggest you focus this week on these four points of emphasis and then we can add four more next week. You will be surprised of how often situations will come up in which you can maintain or enhance self-esteem, listen and respond with empathy, ask for help and encourage involvement, and/or share thoughts, feelings and rationale. Maybe even keep a journal of recognizing when these situations happened and how you responded to each. Make comments for yourself in your journal to help you grow and develop.

One thing I know – I have made so many more mistakes than I have had successes. There are times when my Leadership was downright horrible. Even after 35 years of coaching I still review these competencies and work hard to apply them daily. Does passion or disappointment get in my way of being able to perform these at a high level? Absolutely. But if I am going to ask my players to works on their skill sets, I need to work on mine.

May our Awesome God bless you for your dedication and commitment to your teams.

- Pat Lightle, Player Development, NOVA/DC FCA Baseball