



Team Culture “How we do things here”

As you prepare for the season, or maybe you are just beginning the season, you should consider what your team culture will be. This is a very important part of the process of uniting together your players in a common cause for a common purpose.

There are many ways to discuss and explain team culture. If you Google the term you will get 42 million hits. Team culture applies to sports, business or any group that has a common goal and purpose. We all know situations where the culture was bad. Everybody was only interested in self “me rather than we”. As coaches you are responsible for your team culture whether it is good or bad.

A down and dirty definition: Team Culture: **“How we Do Things Here”**. That pretty much sums it up in a nutshell. But let’s take it a part and see what it means.

Team Culture comes from your values and your non negotiable items. Your team is a direct reflection of you and your values. It is reflected in what you teach your players either directly or indirectly. It is how you act on the bench during games and how you relate to your players during practice and in the locker rooms. It is about how you communicate with parents, board members and referees. Team culture is also about expectations. As a coach you should have expectations of players and parents. They also have a right to expect certain things from you. Be sure you can walk the talk.

So let’s delve into this a bit more. It all starts with your values. What are your primary pillars or foundation that you build your coaching philosophy around? I will share some thoughts with you for your consideration. Youth sports/hockey is about trying to win and teaching kids life long lessons. They both are important. What is critical here is how you go about trying to win. Each player deserves to be respected as an individual and given the opportunity to perform, play and enjoy the sport. As a youth coach you might want to consider what is best for the long term development of your players rather than the meaningless short term objectives of simply playing more games and winning a couple invitational tournaments with a short bench.

To achieve great team culture will take some work on your part. First you need to know and be able to articulate what you believe regarding youth sports. It is these beliefs and values that set the table for the rest of the season. From these beliefs and values come your structure and communication to players and parents.

Step one is to write down your beliefs and values. For example:

- I believe that all players deserve an equal opportunity on my team
- I believe that youth sports teach valuable life lessons
- I believe in a 3-1 practice to game ratio in order to make sure my players develop
- I believe that the players need to have fun playing hockey
- I believe... you add your own

Step two is to articulate these beliefs. For Example;

- All players will get equal ice time over the course of the season.
- All players are expected to give 100% effort at all times
- Players are expected to be positive towards teammates
- We expect and display great sportsmanship in winning and losing

Step three is;

To communicate your values and expectations every day you are with your team. Additionally provide frequent communication with the team parents by email and in person helps to keep everybody on the same track and head off problems.

Step four is to make your team special and consistent with your values. Some ideas include:

Consider using a short meaningful phrase or words on the practice jerseys that will remind players each day of something special about the team.

Team rituals before games or practices that help them identify with each other as a group.

Team rules will help to promote your values. For instance, players may only wear logo wear from your program to and from the arena. For instance, if you coach in South St. Paul players are permitted to wear only non logo apparel or apparel from South St. Paul Hockey. No Notre Damn or Gopher hats and sweatshirts. If player arrives "out of uniform" you can start a nice collection of the inappropriate hats and sweatshirts at home. This is about community and team pride. Be careful that you do not make a rule you cannot or will not enforce.

Step five involves talking to your teams about topics that reflect your values.

Every day you can address issues or incidents that reflect your values.

Email is a great tool to communicate and share articles with parents

You can address issues surrounding excessive celebrations and behaviors following opponent's goals.

Everyday there are things you can spot that help to teach lessons to you players.

Look for them.

Team culture is perhaps more important to a positive and rewarding season than team systems, conditioning drills and player substitutions during games. The culture you bring to the team will guide you, the players and parents throughout the season. Be thoughtful, consistent, and proactive about the culture on your team. A great team culture will insure a successful season for players, parents and coaches.

See you around the rink....

Hal Tearse
Coach in Chief, Minnesota Hockey
September, 2008

For more specific information about team culture go to www.positivecoach.com