

Self Analysis of Leadership Style

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Proficiency Level

According to Arthur et al (2017), “The ability to lead, inspire, and motivate people is an important characteristic” (p.153). It is inevitable that humans form social organizations in order to survive, and these organizations require leadership that has the best interest of all as a main focus. Athletic teams are no different from other societal organizations; a leader is required to communicate intentions and strategies for the best interest of the team as a whole. This is the important role a coach plays – a leader for the athletes involved. Typically, the central focus for a team is winning; but that can’t be done without strong leadership. Coaches act as mentors and guides for their athletes to direct them toward both individual and team goals. Thus, a leadership style needs to fit the needs of the team, which can vary depending on a slough of factors (age, sport, years of experience, emotional dynamics, etc.). This self-analysis will provide a reflective narration of what styles I notice in my coaching, and what areas I would like to improve upon.

The need for leadership in sports is relative to the need for leadership in other social organizations. For this matter, a coach needs to be able to deliver messages effectively to gain respect, trust, and buy in from athletes. Psychology behind coaching leadership/organization states that effective leadership is necessary for developing top performing athletic teams, and for enhancing the quality of the experience for individuals participating on the team. Combined, effective coaching leadership works to advance the success of the team (Wagstaff, 2017). Effective coaching behaviors work to accomplishing multiple goals, and are exercised in various ways. For example, coaching behaviors include providing feedback in a timely manner to allow for athletes to correct errors in performance (Chambers & Vickers, 2006), or to create opportunities that

combine cognitive, motor, and perceptual practice for athletes (Ford et al, 2010).

Regardless of the activity or drill, coaches need to develop leadership styles that work for the benefit of all athletes, and to deliver these styles clearly and consistently.

As presented by Arthur et al (2017), coaching can be looked at as an example of “sports governance” (p. 156). This model encompasses a lot of features common to social organizations, such as “vision, strategy, effective running of [a team], accountability, and supervision” (Arthur et al, 2017, p. 156). To initiate all these features puts responsibility on the coach to be aware of fitting a leadership style that meets the needs of the athletes. Arthur et al present leadership as a three-way blend of various behaviors coaches can use to meet their goals: inspirational leadership behaviors, coaching behaviors, and instruction behaviors (2017). Balancing these three behaviors can yield successful results; this Tripartite Model of Leadership “can be used and adapted to different levels within a sports organization [and] will generate a consistent leadership strategy and, in turn, generate consistent results” (Arthur et al, 2017, p. 162). This model can be effective to help coaches manage the afore mentioned features of sports governance that occur within an organization. Additionally, the TML provides a basis for me to reflect upon my own coaching behaviors.

In previous years, I have coached cross-country at the high school level and track at the middle school level. Running is something that I wasn't good at in middle or high school; once I discovered running, however, it shaped the person I am today, in both physical and mental health. For these sports, my strongest behavior was the inspirational leadership type. During cross-country, I was very open with my team about my own personal history with weight and depression. I open up about how running long distances

(half marathons) was never something I dreamed I could do in those years, and try to deliver the messages to always try your hardest, and that you can do things you never thought you could if you stay focused. Though these messages are cliché, I know they had impact on the girls I coached. I was one of 3 coaches on staff. On days that we would do long runs, I tended to stay with the girls that were not the top varsity level and got to know them really well. On one such run, a girl told me that it was nice to have someone focusing on them, instead of on the girls who were very fast; this showed me that trying to influence and reach out to *all* the athletes on a team makes everyone feel valued. According to Arthur et al, “The Inspirational component of the TML focuses on behaviors that motivate and inspire athletes to achieve beyond expectations” (2017, p. 152). I take pride in the fact that I was able to lead these girls toward personal gains and development, and that I gained first hand knowledge of what inspiration can do.

This is my third year coaching soccer, and the sport is still largely new to me. I’m trying to implement behaviors that have been successful for me in the past with running, particularly in delivering feedback. For example, when the girls were doing a two-mile run as part of training. There was one girl on the team who was clearly out of shape, and frequently stopped to walk and catch her breath; I stayed with her to help her finish the last  $\frac{1}{4}$  or so mile. This girl had a lot to learn about exercising in general, particularly with running. As I ran with her, I helped her to come to a consistent pace, and gave her feedback as we went. For example, I told her to hold herself as tall as she could and to open her chest, explaining that this allowed better oxygen intake. As we ran, I corrected her as she tended to slouch, and she immediately snapped back upright. Delivering immediate feedback helped her to train her body to adapt to running posture, which

helped her athletically over all. As Chambers & Vickers highlight (2006), providing feedback helps athletes improve their long-term performance because they can apply feedback in that minute. Overtime, feedback can lead to “a gradual reduction of input from [the coach], and increased responsibility of the athletes to monitor and modify their personal performance” (Chambers & Vickers, 2006, p. 187). Immediate feedback worked for the girl I mentioned as she progressed throughout the season, as well as a variety of girls who had varying levels of soccer experience (zero years to twelve years). Delivering feedback is a coaching behavior that I will continue to use and develop.

Coaching is one level of “hierarchy” in the organization of team sports. Other leaders include assistant coaches, position coaches, and athletes themselves. Team captains are a traditional component of successful teams and placing students in leadership positions allows them to gain experience necessary for interactions in society. Captains’ responsibilities include acting as role models, communicating effectively with teammates and superiors (coach, athletic director, et), organizing activities, leading warm ups, acting as representation for their teams (Gould et al, 2013). We (the head JV coach and I) look for characteristics of leadership and dedication when selecting captains. In one year, during the beginning weeks of practice, the girls were running a (roughly) two-mile timed running exercise as a measure for fitness testing. There were two girls who had never played soccer before, and were struggling to finish. One particular girl finished her timed exercise, and then went back to run with all the girls until everyone was finished. This included running with the last girl and talking to her and encouraging her. She didn’t increase the pace or yell angrily – she simply helped a teammate; this gesture (among others) immediately singled her out as a captain.

Additionally, other captains were selected based on getting to practice ready to go, encouraging others, helping and offering suggestions, etc. Particularly, we considered how the girls spoke to each other. Last season, we were stuck on picking a captain between two girls – both were the same level of experience and dedication, and both did their best to encourage their teammates. One girl’s delivery was softly spoken, and she approached her teammates individually to give feedback. The other girl was brasher in her delivery. Though she was reaching out in a friendly way to help her teammates, the way she delivered her encouragement came across as more aggressive and outspoken than her teammate, which can cause intimidation for athletes of less experience. As Gould et al point out, some primary responsibilities for captains include “providing encouragement and support...assisting younger players...being flexible in their approach...[and] being vocal” (2013, p.17). Though both of the girls possessed these abilities, we selected the girl who presented herself less aggressively was our choice because her approach to working with her teammates came across as more friendly and supportive.

Traditionally, our captains have served such roles as leading half time talks, warm ups, team building activities, etc. Additionally, our captains recognize the importance of the position, and strive to be leaders in how they act and perform. This year, I would like to see our captains take on more coaching behaviors. Coaching behaviors can be defined as “directly concerned with the immediate improvement of performance and the development of skills by a form of tutoring and instruction” (Arthur et al, 2017, p.165). Having the captains take on coaching behaviors could have very beneficial impacts on team improvement. Particularly, I think this could be achieved by the use of questioning

from the captains to their teammates. Benefits could include bringing athletes closer together, and allow the captains to be better leaders. Because we select captains based on communication, this could be very well applied by having them ask questions to their teammates. According to Arthur et al (2017), leadership is not about “laissez-faire approach to leadership; rather a questioning technique and working through...problems will be required” (p.167). If we can get out coaches to ask questions to their teammates, they will have a better understanding of what the individual athletes will be thinking and feeling, and can adjust their leadership to suit the needs of their team.

Until conducting a study regarding the impact of questioning athletes, I had never considered their effect. Having realized how effective this strategy is, I will make a point to ask questions according to the GROW model (that is, goals, reality, obstacles, and action steps – what *will* you do from here) of discussion (Gould, 2017). After applying this model, I had a very engaging discussion with an athlete who does not play on a team I coach. As such, I am eager to apply this strategy to working with my own athletes. Additionally, I would like to improve my coaching behaviors, particularly in developing my knowledge of the coaching process. Arthur et al suggest that coaching behaviors are designed to “facilitate...self-awareness, ownership, and empowerment” (2017, p.166). I think I have come to a solid understanding of facilitating empowerment, but I can set a new goal for myself to learn how to help athletes take ownership of their behaviors, performances, etc. Perhaps one of the best behaviors a coach can practice is reflection of current performance, and projection for the future.

## References

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