

Your captains need to do these 12 things today

By [Jeff Janssen](#)

Demonstrating leadership is simple if players know how

Athletes of all ages often wonder, “What can I do to be a better leader?”

While often subtle, leaders are afforded at least a dozen opportunities to demonstrate leadership every day. These leadership opportunities rarely are available in the form of dramatic, rousing, win-one-for-the-Gipper speeches, but more often present themselves in simple but significant interactions on a daily basis.

There’s a quote by Helen Keller we often use in our Leadership Academies that drives home the value of these seemingly trivial, yet critical leadership moments.

She said, “I long to accomplish great and noble tasks, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.”

Most emerging leaders erroneously view and define leadership as the mighty shoves reserved only for the heroic captains of the team. In actuality, it’s the tiny pushes of leadership that are much more plentiful and ultimately impactful over time.

To help both your emerging and existing leaders recognize, value and act on the many tiny pushes of leadership available to them every day, I created a simple 12-point checklist. Go over the checklist with your leaders to show them just how simple leadership can be yet how powerful these daily leadership actions can have on your program and the athletes within it.

1. Be the hardest worker at practice today.

Without fail, one of the quickest ways to impact a team is with your own work ethic. Choose to be one of the hardest workers on your team today. Not only does it set the tone for the work ethic of your program, it also is one of the best and quickest ways to enhance your leadership credibility with your teammates and coaches.

2. Be a spark of energy and enthusiasm today.

Let your passion for your sport shine through today. Spread a contagious energy and enthusiasm among your teammates. Think about how lucky you are to play and compete. Remember back to when you were a child and reconnect with the joy you had for the game. Make your sport fun again for yourself and your teammates.

3. Model mental toughness today.

Because your teammates look to you under pressure, adversity and stress, you must be the model of mental toughness. Bounce back quickly after errors to show your teammates how to respond to negative situations. Maintain your poise and optimism despite any mistakes you make, and your teammates will rely on you to get them through the tough times.

4. Connect with a teammate today.

Leadership is all about relationships. Invest the time to build and strengthen the relationships you have with each of your teammates. Inquire about their day, their challenges and their goals. Make a special and ongoing effort to get to know everyone on your team, not just your friends and classmates. The relationship building you do each day pays off down the road.

5. Compliment a teammate today.

Be on the lookout for teammates who are contributing to your team. Call out a teammate for making a hustle play, pushing through a weight workout, recovering quickly from a mistake or getting an “A” on an exam. Praise the actions and attitudes you want to see repeated. As Mother Teresa once said, “Kind words are short and easy to speak but their echoes are truly endless.”

6. Challenge a teammate today.

Challenge at least one of your teammates today. Positively push them and yourself to make the most of your workout. Make a friendly wager to see if they can be successful at least four out of five times in a drill. See if you both can improve your times in conditioning. Offer to stay after to help if they want to do extra work. Good leaders consistently invite, inspire and sometimes implore others to greatness.

7. Support a teammate today.

Odds are at least one of your teammates is struggling with something today — a performance slump, a rocky relationship, a disagreement with a coach, an unglamorous role, struggling in a class or a relative who is sick. Good leaders consistently look out for teammates who are struggling and offer an ear to listen, an encouraging word, a pat on the back or a shoulder to cry on.

8. Constructively confront negativity, pessimism and laziness today.

As a leader, have the courage to confront constructively the negativity, pessimism and laziness that crops up in your team from time to time. Instead of fueling the fire by joining in or silently standing by, be sure to refocus your teammates on solutions rather than bemoaning the problems. Left unchecked, these problems quickly grow to distract, divide and destroy your team.

9. Build and bond your team today.

Team chemistry naturally ebbs and flows throughout the season. Take the time to monitor and maintain your team’s chemistry. Let your reserves and support staff know how much you appreciate them. Stay connected and current with each of the natural sub-groups on your team. Douse any brush fires flaring up and continually remind people about your common goal and common bond.

10. Check in with your coach today.

Invest the time to check in with your coach today. Ask what you can do to best help the team this week. Find out what your coach wants to accomplish with today's practice. Also discuss if there is anything your coach is concerned about regarding your team. Discuss your collective insights on your team's chemistry, focus and mindset. Work together to effectively co-lead your team.

11. Remind your team how today's work leads to tomorrow's dreams.

It's easy to get bogged down during your season with monotonous drills, tiring conditioning and demanding workouts. Remind your teammates how all the quality work you do today gives you a distinct advantage over your opponents. Help them see and even get excited about how today's hard work is a long-term investment in your team's goals, rather than just a short-term hardship or sacrifice.

12. Represent yourself and team with class and pride today.

Leaders have the awesome privilege and responsibility of representing their teams. Take advantage of this opportunity by representing your team with class and pride today. Hold a door open for someone, sit in the front rows of class, and actively engage in discussion, say please and thank you, dress in respectful attire, etc. These tiny pushes represent you and your team with class and distinction — and they ultimately set you up for a lifetime of respect and success.

Great leaders willingly invest the time and effort to demonstrate these 12 leadership behaviors on a daily basis. In doing so, they build strong relationships, keep your team on track and enhance their credibility. Encourage your emerging leaders to seek to take advantage of at least seven to nine of these on daily basis.

Your veteran leaders should capitalize on 10 to all 12 of these opportunities.

And as a coach, I encourage you to go back and look at all 12 again as well. The 12 leadership behaviors also are things you could and should do on a daily basis. Be sure you are taking advantage of these 12 pushes of leadership, which ultimately make a huge impact on your team.

To learn more about developing your leaders, visit www.janssensportsleadership.com.

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