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MAKE THE DIFFERENCE THAT CAN LAST A LIFETIME

COACHINGEZINE

THE HOW-TO FOR COACHING KIDS

The Greatest Skill

Category: Play/Performance



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Of all of the skills, qualities and character traits we have the opportunity to teach our young athletes, or children in general, is there one that is the most important?

There are many that are important. But is there one that is MOST important?

Would it be strength, determination, perseverance, discipline, commitment, passion, speed, quickness, agility, respect for others, teamwork, or a love of the game or of learning? These traits can help produce top athletes, or top performers in any field for sure. **But the greatest character quality we can teach our kids is adaptability.** It is critical for our survival at a minimum and also a prerequisite for success. It is essential, yet rarely taught.



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Americans are obsessed with reality TV. From Survivor, to The Amazing Race, The Apprentice, The Bachelor, to Road Rules, to Fear Factor, to the World Poker Tour, we love to watch others be challenged. From the boardroom to athletic fields we respect, revere and reward those who can think on their feet, roll with the punches, look on the bright side, perform under pressure, respond in the face of adversity and make lemonade out of lemons. Donald Trump looks for it in his apprentices and coaches look for it in their star athletes.

Leadership

Many coaches will tout that leadership is one of the major outcomes of youth sports. While it can be for some, it is not the case for everyone.



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So, it is not just participating in youth sports that leads to leadership. But a trait that can be taught, cultivated and developed.

The essence of leadership is adaptability.

The ability to change your course of action based on the situation or circumstances. In business, it could be creating new products, adjusting a sales strategy to make up for a previous quarters shortcomings, a flexible work schedule, getting the project done, and on time, in spite of losing a team member due to an illness, or a adjusting to yet another new boss, with yet another idea of “the way things should be.”



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In your personal life, adaptability could be adjusting to life after “the accident,” a downsized work situation, the death of a loved one, the betrayal of a close friend, a divorce, a fire, a cancer diagnosis, dealing with the addiction of a family member, or the loss of a pet. **The essence of success in life is adaptability.** The ability to rise above the difficulties and disappointments, to not get stuck playing the victim card, to move on and to actually flourish.

In sports, adaptability can be calling an audible, making half-time locker room adjustments, shooting off-balance, playing injured, making substitutions due to injuries, making the best of a busted play or inclement weather, rebounding after a blowout, or being



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down by two with three minutes left in the game. **The most successful athletes are those who can adapt to their current situation and make the best of it.**

In sports, and in life, it is not the best plan who is the most successful, but the athletes, coaches or people, who make the best adjustments that are the most successful. “The Drive” by the '86 Denver Broncos, led by Hall of Fame quarterback John Elway comes to mind. In the face of “insurmountable” odds, with virtually no time left on the clock and 98 yards to go, one of the players in the huddle at the beginning of the drive says, “We got ‘em, right where we want ‘em.”



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He knew that it was not just Elway's skill that would help the team march down the field and score the tying touchdown, but his leadership. And his leadership developed from a career of adapting, of scrambling, throwing across the field, of taking big hits, of improvising, and of being behind a lot. Adapting to changing situations and being able to overcome adversity were the trademarks of John Elway's career. Because of his adaptability and his resulting leadership, Elway led the Broncos to back-to-back Super Bowl Championships and over forty come-from-behind victories.



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Those of you who have coached for a while know that the best athletes are not necessarily the best leaders. The best leaders are the ones who can adapt the best and the fastest. In Elway's case, or Michael Jordan's, it comes in not only reading a defense, but by being able to adapt and perform off-balance and complete the touchdown pass or make the winning basket at the buzzer.

Adaptability in Action

So what does adaptability look like? What does it look like to teach it, cultivate it and have young athletes display it in sports and in their personal lives? The following pages have a few suggestions. By preparing your athletes for whatever may come their way, you will be preparing them for success in sports and in life.



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How-To

Practice game-like situations. Often we create false environments that do not lead to acquiring and developing skills that can be actually used during a game.

Practice busted plays. It's going to happen and you might as well be prepared for them. In football for example, if every play is executed perfectly, the offense would score a touchdown on almost every play. Most designed plays will not be perfect. Practice how to make the best of them.



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How-To

Practice off-balance moves.

Sometimes the game winners and the highlight film material is executed in “strange” or off-balance positions. Practice the difficult lie in golf, not just the tee shot where it is set up just the way you want it and you have all the time in the world.

Make the “two-minute-drill” part of your regular practice time. When you need to move faster, will your team be ready?

Practice odd-man rushes. Both on offense and defense. Very rarely in game situations will your players, or theirs, be where they are supposed to be. So practice how that will feel.



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How-To

Practice with a different ball or more than one at a time. Play and fun for the kids will increase if you mix things up. Try playing soccer or roller hockey with a football. Try playing roller hockey, basketball or soccer with two balls at the same time. Does it change the game? Certainly! It's just fun and it does teach your players to be very aware of the whole playing area and causes to dribble the ball in sports with the head up. It teaches them to expect the unexpected.



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How-To

Practice on a different surface. What effect will too long of grass have on your players? Not all of the youth playing fields will be in perfect shape. What effect will it have? What if the surface was totally different? What if it was just for fun? Have your soccer practice on the roller hockey rink. Or “play” football there sometime. Your kids will actually be PLAYING, and enjoying it. By creating variations, even though they may not be game-like situations, you create an environment that is more spontaneous, playful and more child-like, which will feel more natural to the CHILDREN you are coaching and teaching.



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In this way you will engage their interest and their desire to create their own variations. If you do this enough they will learn both the basics and discover their inner child, while performing amazing highlight film moves. It will come naturally because they have been allowed to “play with” the ideas and moves before.

When you allow them to adjust and adapt on their own they will become better at sports and in life!

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