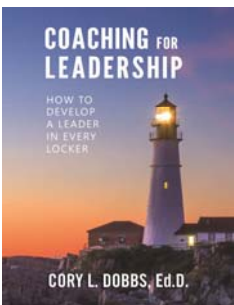


TEAMWORK INTELLIGENCE

THE EDULETTER FOR SPORT LEADERS

Cory Dobbs, Ed.D.

*“It’s not enough
to know how to
lead; you need to
know how to
build leaders
too.”*



**Leadership
Resource!**

**Coaching for
Leadership**

*One of the most
critical decisions
every coach makes is
whether to let team
leaders develop in a
“do-it-yourself” style
or deliberately
implement a
leadership
development
program.*

**Check Out Our
New Leadership
& Team Building
Resources**

Norming the Team

Why Norms are the Driver of Team Culture

On a scale from one to ten, how important is having a positive culture to your team’s ability to reach its potential? When I ask coaches this question, most of them answer in the nines and tens. Even the most inexperienced of them agree that, like it or not, the team’s culture holds the key to a team’s capacity. Talent is the foundation for winning, but culture is the guiding force that determines a team’s potential.

Even the least talented team can enjoy its experience if it’s imbued with a positive and motivating culture. Let’s face it, only one team will win the conference championship. However, every team will rise to its capacity if its culture is carefully nurtured.

Think of culture like a vibrant and dynamic river. All rivers are powered by the volume of water, the pull of gravity, and the focus produced by a river’s banks. The volume of water comes from many small sources—tributaries—flowing in the same direction and landing in the river. Think of a team’s members as the many small sources, each contributing volume to the rush of the river that is the team’s culture. The pull of gravity provides force as the river rages toward its goal—the ocean. And just like the ocean, team’s pursue an ultimate goal—a desired end-state. The banks, like a team’s norms, provide boundaries that serve to concentrate and funnel the flow thereby giving the river more force and power. A team’s norms contribute to its social structure that like the river’s banks provides stability, direction, and intensity of organized effort.

Unfortunately, many teams are more like puddles or ponds than powerful rivers. They stop short of reaching their capacity and the team experience becomes one of struggle, conflict, and dysfunction. The channeling effect of the river’s banks makes all the difference between a puddle and a vigorous and focused river.

So, how do you go about creating a high-performing team culture?

The golden rule of culture building is found in relationships. How team members interact and the kinds of relationships they form has everything to do with what kind of culture emerges, has everything to do with the emergence of trust, commitment, and individual and team performance. Much of the success of a team lies in the crafting of a sense of “us.” It lies in the norms, values and priorities that emerge to shape the shared understanding of “who we are.” A team’s norms channel the sum of all these forces.

Generally speaking, norms are shared standards that define what behaviors are acceptable and desired by a team’s members. They are informal “agreements,” not formal rules or policies.

Norming the Team (continued)

Norms emerge and develop from individual behaviors that take place one-to-one, as well as team norms of one-to-many and many-to-many. Two players may have a relationship that includes good-natured ribbing of one another, while the ribbing might not be a desired behavior in a team meeting. Norms act as guidelines, embedded rules of behavior if you will, that inform behavior and expectations in interpersonal interactions.

In the scheme of the well-worn Tuckman's five stages of a team—forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning—the norming stage occurs when conflict has been resolved and team unity and harmony emerge. Once the norming stage kicks into gear the aspirations of the team become visible and elicit inspiration. A team that has achieved a high degree of maturity relating to team norms is likely to have a strong culture, whereas an immature team—low agreement and adherence to team norms—is likely to have a weak culture. Simply said, norms are vital for developing a high-performing team culture.

STAGE 3: NORMING *The Cohesion Stage*

During this stage, team conflict and chaos subside as the team achieves a sense of cohesion. When the team reaches this stage, team members feel a sense of unity and responsibility to other team members. Encouragement and acknowledgement of individual and team successes are the norm and commitment to team goals begins to take shape. A collective identity materializes. Close relationships will bring trust allowing team leaders to offer team members more constructive feedback.

Team leaders should know that their teammates might be asking themselves:

Do my teammates appreciate me for who I am and what I contribute?
 What is my role on the team?
 Do my teammates value me as a member of this team?
 Who is committed to our team's mission and goals?

During the norming stage team leaders might:

Assess progress toward team cohesion and team goals.
 Identify and find ways to break down "new" barriers that are limiting commitment to each other and the team's goals.
 Keep team members focused on the team norms—those acceptable behaviors that are shared by the team's members.
 Revisit the "I can trust you when..." and "I can't trust you when..." exercise.

**Passage taken from The Academy for Sport Leadership's Teamwork Intelligence Workbook for Student-Athletes*

Here's a sample of norm statements:

- We put team needs in front of our individual needs. Encourage members to learn new things.
- We are committed to open, honest, and tactful dialogue. Everyone must speak and listen.
- We support one another personally even when we are in conflict.
- We challenge members to become a better person.
- We respect one another at all times. Yet we see each others' bad habits and help them to work on them.
- Each of us is to be aware of our impact on the others and seek to ensure that our ideas, actions, and emotions challenge and support the team.
- Each of us is responsible for understanding and managing our own behaviors and emotions in ways that support the team.
- Each of us is responsible for holding each other accountable for owning our behaviors and emotions and to helping us grow and develop as responsible people.