



COACHES

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR
TEAM

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Many new coaches base the success of their season solely on how many trophies they accumulate. Coaches who have been around for longer will tell you that there are other aspects of coaching – especially building strong relationships with your squad members – that are equally as important to a successful season and a successful career as a coach.

It takes more than basic sports knowledge to develop a solid coaching strategy. Sure, you'll need to have a grasp on fundamental cheerleading techniques, but you'll need to know and do much more. Otherwise, the athletes themselves can get overlooked!

Since there is no exact formula for success, coaches can have a hard time determining the best leadership style for their teams. But there's one step worth every coach's effort:

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHEERLEADERS AND DANCERS!

In order to get your cheerleaders and dancers to perform as a team, you must first understand how to pull what you need from the individual athletes. The tactics that may motivate one participant may not work on another cheerleader or dancer. Some people need a challenge in order to meet a goal. They may need individualized specific directions about the job that you want them to perform. Other cheerleaders and dancers may only perform well if they are given the freedom to discover the proper method on their own.

These differences can be frustrating. Try turning to outside sources for assistance. Parents, teachers and past coaches can supply pertinent information because they are familiar with the work habits and personal style of the individual. Once you get to know both the strengths and weaknesses of each cheerleader or dancer, you can take the next step in successful coaching, which is to make sure you create a plan of action for the team as a whole. (That's right – your role as coach is to focus on both the group and the individuals who make up that group, and you'll need plans for both).

Once you have conjured up a plan for the team, you can work on motivation. You'll want to be sure that motivation comes from within the team as well as from the coach. The personality of a cheerleading squad can vary tremendously.

Motivation might originate in the form of positive reinforcement. This could be the reduction of a disliked task, or the addition of something that the cheerleaders and dancers enjoy. If the reward is visually accessible, like a cheerleader or dancer of the month poster hung near a lunchroom, library or gym, people other than the recipient will take notice and this will cause positive attention.

If you reinforce with something fun like a poster, try to include the cheerleaders and dancers physical accomplishments, academic achievements and/or social triumphs. By acknowledging the athletes activities outside of the practice gym, you are demonstrating a sincere interest in their lives.

You might want to consider getting your squad together at least once a month to perform an activity that does not relate to your sport. It is important for your team to create long lasting bonds that will tie them together outside of cheerleading.

Strong relationships help to build a strong team. It's up to you, as the coach, to be a role model in this regard. Your cheerleaders and dancers will reward your dedication, and you'll have a happier, more successful team.

