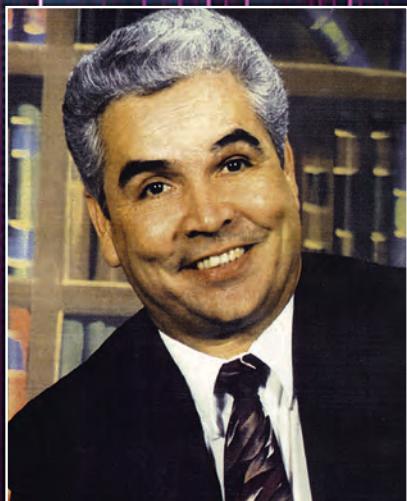


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FIVE ESSENTIALS OF LEADERSHIP

Paul Vitale

Coaches from a multitude of backgrounds have been propelled into leadership roles, either by choice or necessity. Those unwavering warriors eager to charge full steam ahead step up without much hesitation and begin the crucial task of leading. For those who take the reins with a more subtle approach, the fact still remains the same: Leadership is based on the process in which one person enlists the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.

While some individuals may have exhibited leadership behavior from a very early age, others assume the role. In an article titled, "Can You Teach Leadership: Confronting Conventional Thought," Melissa Vokoun challenges the fundamental question, "Can anyone become a leader?" and goes on to write that conventional thought says that leadership is inborn; however, today's athletic community believes that with the right opportunity, anyone can lead.

In whichever case or category a person falls, this truth is clear: Those who are called into a position of guiding others have an incredible amount of influence—either positive or negative. Knowing this, as coaches shouldn't we always aspire to become unmistakable leaders who not only lead but aren't afraid to "follow the leader" as well? It is amazing how much knowledge is acquired when we sit still and listen to what others have suggested countless times, to countless warriors.

Have a servant's heart. Effective leaders answer the plea for assistance by possessing a genuine interest in mankind. Robert Greenleaf, founder of a modern servant leadership movement, said, "Good leaders must first become good servants." Selfless coaches leave unforgettable marks, recognizing the needs of those entrusted to their guidance. They see the larger picture, understanding that the very heart of leadership is its purpose, unencumbered by the need for personal recognition. I have always considered a quality leader as one who does a little more than what is expected - not every once in a while, but all the time.

Ignite the eagerness in others. Whether large or small, those



called to lead both on and off the playing field contribute to the amount of hope and inspiration others possess. By radiating positive energy, assessing and defining reality, outlining priorities and incorporating alternative points of view, effective coaches compose unique designs that declare, "When nothing is certain, anything is possible." Igniting excitement for a common cause is not necessarily about bouncing off the walls and acting chaotic; it's more about setting a tone of positive energy that moves others toward accomplishment.

Reinvent tendencies and techniques. Setbacks can be setups for enormous growth. Or, at least this is the way I've approached many of my life's growth spurts. The opportunity to reformulate trends and methods will always be part of the DNA of leadership. Those who not only survive but thrive throughout the reinvention process are resilient during setbacks, admit mistakes while learning lessons, and act boldly and decisively when making adjustments. They react promptly and give themselves permission to change for the better, while recognizing that odds are they are their toughest critics.

Possess a courageous attitude. Author Charles Kiefer once said, "Leadership is what the rest of us call it when we see someone doing something they love and we want to help." I would venture to say, exemplary leaders are those who are not only the recipients of such help, but delight in knowing that their team members feel as though they led the way in getting the job done. It takes confidence to rise to the occasion of coaching others down a path toward accomplishment. Understanding this, the question still remains, "Does my attitude consist of the courage needed to not only inspire others to carry on during difficult times, but to encourage myself to keep learning, developing, and refining the traits that exemplify quality leadership as a coach?"

Be consistent in action. It seems to me that legendary leaders are internally authentic and externally consistent. Not only do they speak it, they live it; and not just every now and then, but again and again. With consistency comes respect; with respect comes trust; and with trust comes the privilege to lead. These are the results leaders set their sights on and do their best to live up to on a daily basis. When others witness actions that are fair and steady, positive results increase and morale is elevated, equaling greater success.

As simple as these or any of the other characteristics of leadership we have learned seem, one truth still remains: Those who are called into a position of guiding others, whether through athletics or in the classroom, have an incredible amount

of influence—either positive or negative. And through that influence athletes can be inspired to accomplish as much or as little as they see being modeled. Enact an open-minded approach to the ideas of others, encourage steady streams of dialogue, applaud team members for a job well done, and become a champion for a cohesive team approach. If you do this, your inner warrior will be better equipped to charge the frontlines of leadership and succeed!

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Paul Vitale, founder of Vital Communications, Inc., is a professional speaker and author based in Little Rock, Arkansas. He travels the globe presenting seminars and keynote presentations to various organizations while contributing content to regional and national publications. For additional information, visit paulvitale.com or call 501-663-1454.

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