

Teaching “*Character*” through Baseball

- I. Why are we here?
 - a. I feel pretty comfortable making the following statement: You should be coaching to help every kid on your team develop as a person.
 - b. I would never pretend that there are not other important objectives, but this one should be at the top of the list.
 - c. We are here to help kids become people of strong character.
- II. OK Coach, I agree. So how do I do that?
 - a. I think that there are really three ways to develop character in your kids, and they go hand in hand:
 - i. Communicate
 - ii. Model
 - iii. Anticipate opportunities to reinforce
- III. Communicating the character traits that are important to you
 - a. First, you must identify what they are: As an example, the PHS baseball program has six “Principles of Success”
 - b. These principles are important to me. They are in writing. They are distributed at pre-season meetings and posted on our website. We discuss them from time to time. And I can say this with absolute confidence: Our emphasis on these traits has dramatically influenced the behavior of our players.
 - c. I do not believe that you need to “copy” what we’ve done. Items like this can be incorporated in team goals, team rules, or a variety of other avenues. What I think is important is that you take time to think about what you want to teach your players, and that you then communicate it to them.
- IV. Modeling
 - a. That hits home doesn’t it.
 - b. How many of you have ever heard the expression, “a team takes on the personality of its coach”? I think there is a lot of truth in that statement.
 - c. Let me give you some examples of this:
 - i. If you want your kids to always “be on time”, you should always be on time. In fact, you should strive to be the first person there and the last person to leave.
 - ii. If you want your kids to control their emotions, don’t be a screamer or a whiner.
 - iii. If you want your kids to work hard, you better work hard. They know when you have gone above and beyond in your preparation. They see when you have a practice plan or have otherwise put thought and effort into what you are doing.
 - d. It is unreasonable to expect your players to do things you are not willing to do.
- V. Anticipating opportunities to reinforce: A proactive approach to teachable moments

- a. Once you have identified a short list of qualities or character traits that you want to reinforce to your kids on a regular basis, you should think about situations that will arise as great opportunities to do so. Think about:
 - i. Things that usually happen to a team during a season
 - ii. Things that sometimes happen to individual players
 - iii. Draw on your past experiences to do this.
 - b. As coaches, we often wish we would have said or done something differently. We wish we had had time to think before reacting. You do. You just need to make time for it.
- VI. OK. And what character traits should we be trying to teach?
- a. I will give you a few examples that really fit with the sport of baseball. Again, you have shared these with your players, and are looking for opportunities to apply them in a practical way.
 - 1. Unselfishness
 - a. Praise kids in front of your team when they act in unselfish ways. When your P pats a guy who made an error on the back. When a star player lets the 15th man pinch hit for him. When a player executes a sacrifice bunt.
 - b. Andy Bremberger – 2005 (quick story)
 - 2. Humility
 - a. Give your players the credit.
 - b. Show others respect.
 - 3. Accountability
 - a. Admit when you are wrong. Publicly, to the whole team.
 - 4. Toughness
 - a. It's very difficult to "push" a kid to play when he may be hurt. You feel terrible when a player gets hurt, but at the same time, if you are not "injured," you should be on the field. Again, rewarding a player by praising him in front of the team when he played with pain has an impact on everybody else.
 - 5. Mental Toughness/Dealing with Adversity
 - a. Becoming mentally tough requires a pre-meditated approach.
 - b. The primary way to help your kids become mentally tough is to teach them to always "focus on the things they can control."
 - i. As a hitter, you do not control whether you get a hit. You have more control over whether you hit the ball hard, but still, do not directly control that. You do control your approach, thought process, and the type of swing you take.

- c. One other thing we do to help kids coach themselves through this is “dumping it out.”
6. Discipline
- a. Discipline is “subtle control through organization.” As a coach, it is your job to exercise this.
 - b. Just as important, however, is “self-discipline.” You help your kids become self-disciplined by teaching them to reward themselves for doing the little things well.
7. Competing
- a. I don’t believe in playing without a scoreboard. A big part of life is learning how to compete. Yes athletics should be fun for kids, and yes we must keep a balanced perspective as coaches, but part of the enjoyment comes from giving it your all.
 - b. And I will say this, it is important for EVERY kid to learn what it means to be a competitor, regardless of his ability level. Some of the best competitors I’ve coached have been average to below average in ability. But, those same kids will find something they enjoy doing and be very successful, because they know how to compete.
 - c. What happens to kids when they fail? They pretend not to care. And what do we do as parents? We reinforce. Johnny gets in the car after a bad game and says “I hate baseball, it’s stupid.” And we say, “Hey, it doesn’t matter, your playing “just for fun”. To that kid, just for fun means I’m no good. Why not tell him, “I know you’re upset, and that’s actually a good thing. It means you care. You just need to keep giving your best effort.”
 - d. Last thing on competing: Create competitive situations. How many bunts can you get between the cones out of ten. How many line drives out of ten. How many pop-ups in a row can we catch as a team. “Confrontation time” at PHS.
8. Leadership
- a. *He who think he leads but has no followers, is only taking a walk.*
 - b. You have to be a leader. A leader empowers others to do the work. The true leader can be recognized because the people who work with or under him consistently demonstrate superior performances.
 - c. As a varsity coach, I am constantly looking for ways to give our assistant coaches, our captains, and our other players more responsibility. This is the

way they grow. I believe you should do the same. Every once in a while, ask your kids what they feel you need to work on at practice, or let your assistant coach coach third base.

VII. Concluding thoughts

- a. This whole speech is really about impacting kids. All of you, whether you like it or not, have an impact on the kids you coach. The world we live in isn't always easy for kids. Some of them have difficult home lives, and others don't even have a dad around. You may be fulfilling that role without even knowing it. I just want you to encourage you to be aware of this and to do your best to influence all of the kids you coach in a positive way.

Attachments:

PHS "Principles of Success"

Leader List

A Winning Way

The Men on the Bench