

Lasting Virtues that Build Champions

By Ben Peterson Olympic Champion

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There are many virtues that a young athlete will benefit from. These qualities will empower them through their athletic pursuits and will guide them throughout life. Please follow me as I explain how my brother John, I and our Staff work to communicate 5 key virtues to our Campers.

#1 Respect for Parents:

This is a foundational value. Respect for the authorities around us is a constant need. The most basic place to learn and express this is towards the first and most basic relationship we have with our Parents. From the beginning we sought to teach this at Camp of Champs. In the early days of Camp we had our Dad & Mom involved with preparations. They were involved with greeting our Campers and always spoke to our Campers. John & I had great respect for them and wanted our wrestlers to see respect and learn to show their own parents respect.

Today our own children attend our camps and get very much involved. We also have some of our staff bring their families or sons. This exhibits a respectful, wholesome family setting which has proved very beneficial. We have family style meals twice each day. Campers and parents often observe family respect and comment about it. Regular illustrations and reminders are useful to obtain this virtue that is the 5th of the 10 commandments.

We also make several motivational flyers available to our campers. One was written by our Mother which is called, "Grandma's Story". I wrote one about my Dad called, "What every Wrestler Needs from his Dad." Another tells about our Parents working a dairy farm in northern Wisconsin while we were young. It is called, "The Raising of Champions." John has several outlines that he has used at our Father/Son Camps to encourage and teach parental respect. Whenever our counselors see campers showing disrespect we urge them to work at helping those kids.

#2 Discipline:

Teaching discipline is a key part of most any coaching. At Camp of Champs we drill specifically on techniques that are proven to work. We have older college athletes actively train with the younger athletes. Running in the morning, lifting, drilling, Iron Man and competition are actively done at an intense pace so each young athlete can see and experience what high intensity and competition looks like. The need to eat and get good sleep is important. Even the menu has a touch of discipline - good healthy eating. Also cabin cleanup is used to teach discipline and respect.

Marathon Day is the climax of our toughest Camp which is for Juniors and Seniors. After 3 plus hours of training they think they have earned rest. But after the best meal of the week we get back on the mat. They need to prove to themselves that even when very fatigued they can still train. We have a shortened, unique session. Once they get back into it their bodies are ready to go again. This becomes part of the challenge. Athletes must work through the exercise of discipline.

#3 Loyalty:

Loyalty is essential in the team aspect of any sport. Loyalty to our coach, our school or wrestling club is a must. At camp we tell stories about athletes that exhibit loyalty. We compliment and praise those who exhibit it.

I have often said that one of the most disappointing things I've seen in our sport is having a wrestler come to camp and then later hear he has quit wrestling. Very often it is because of problems with the coach. We often tell campers they do not have a perfect coach. They need to get ready to work with others who have faults and limitations. If you look down the road you are probably going to find a program and coach that is more appealing and more skilled and maybe just plain better. But they are not your team and coach. So learn to be loyal. It will be an invaluable trait and bring definite rewards down the road. Seek to respect your team and your coach and use them to build your own skills and your team's success.

Since there are limitations and short comings in our coaches and our teammates, we must look at how we can strengthen and encourage rather than how we can be critical.

#4 Patriotism:

We have always emphasized patriotism to the USA at Camp of Champs. We use flag raising, the national anthem, The Pledge of Allegiance, prayer for our country and our leaders and much more to exhibit and practice patriotism. We tell stories of international travel, where freedoms and material things of America are compared to the limitations of most foreign countries. Stories are told about experiences in foreign countries that show us how blessed we are in America. We seek to inspire the campers to appreciate anew what we have in this country. Also we use our USA uniforms and medals as visible signs and symbols to the kids. Our kitchen staff often decorates the dinning hall in patriotic colors of red, white and blue.

One of the saddest things I witnessed as a competitor for our US Teams was when a skilled trained athlete would make our Team and then not be motivated to represent the USA in the very best way possible. It was like making the Team was enough for them. They were honored as a Team member but not motivated extra to win for that Team. John and I were regularly motivated anew with the thought of our Country being honored over others. A patriotic spirit can drive men to incredible heights. I urge our youth to read about the history of America and learn all you can about the blessings God has given this nation. In a tough spot this virtue could give a whole new level of meaning to life.

#5 Fear of God:

A healthy balanced respect of God is a great asset to any person. It can cause us to be trustworthy and dependable even when no person is watching. If I remember that God sees all I do and think and that He must judge me I am reminded to do what is right. This virtue is basic to all the other virtues. It will stabilize and strengthen other virtues that are so valuable to any athlete. At Camp of Champs, after hours of training and having plenty of intense fun, we take a few minutes to consider our responsibilities to God. We have found this a great asset to our wrestlers on and off the mats. Our volleyball campers express the same appreciation.

My purpose in writing this article is to encourage all who coach, guide and inspire young athletes to remember there is much more than head position and using the hips. There are some great tools we have called Virtues that will support and reinforce the thinking and mind set of those we guide. To you athletes I urge you to study to strengthen these Virtues. It will help you now as a competitor and then all through life.

You can find other articles by Ben, John & Andy Peterson at their web site. Today they run Camp of Champs Wrestling Camps. Contact them at: Camp of Champs, PO Box 222, Watertown, WI 53094; Phone: 800-505-5099; E-mail: info@campofchamps.org; Web: www.campofchamps.org