

Leadership Pointers

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The importance of good leadership cannot be overstated. The longer I live and work around wrestling, the more I see a need for us to intently address this issue. Team and program success has always been greatly influenced by the effectiveness of the leadership. Wrestlers repeatedly are asked to be leaders. Therefore, it has become my desire to develop not only wrestling skills, but also leadership skills.

Many of us find it easy to roll up our sleeves and work. But there have been times when I've found myself and other wrestlers working hard to reach a goal, only to look around halfway through the project and see that we're all alone.

The following pointers are steps that can help all of us become more effective in leading and directing others, whether it be in our wrestling program, school, community, or in our own household.

1. Establish and reinforce a clear direction for your life. Writing out a simple mission statement can be invaluable both in knowing your direction yourself and also for communicating it to others. Many leaders have failed simply because there was not a clearly stated direction for their leadership. So write out your mission, your purpose(s), and goal(s). Think about them, dream about them, and then give them clearly to others.

Personally, I always sift my mission, purpose, and goal by daily reading God's Word. I use the Bible to shake out and separate my ideas, to be sure the goals I desire to accomplish and lead others to reach will be good goals and not harmful ones. This practice has saved me (and many others) from frustration and heartache afterwards. May I recommend that you work for what is right and not just for what is easy or expected? This world tends to talk of reaching a vacation and retirement instead of accomplishing good. Be sure to seek what is right and good, not what is just comfortable and glamorous.

2. Break your mission, purpose, and goals into manageable and obtainable elements. The old statement that "Rome was not built in a day" is true. We reach goals step by step. As a leader, you should direct others what steps to take and tasks to accomplish to help reach the big goal. Make those steps small enough so that each can see individual progress, and avoid becoming discouraged. Each task should be realistic for others to accomplish for any given time period.

3. Organize yourself to remember #1 and deal with the elements of #2. Using a simple calendar is a good place to start. A daily planner can be very useful as the tasks and responsibilities start adding up. Creating a notebook to keep all the written statements, elements, and progress towards the stated mission and goals can be very helpful. Develop files for materials and summaries for this project and resources for future projects.

4. Learn about people corporately and individually, and treat them accordingly. This will help you recruit the right individuals for the right aspects of accomplishing the mission. I have found that the more I know people as a whole, and the more I know about each individual, the better I know how to assign them tasks that are right for them and therefore limit frustration.

5. Seek an intensity and growth of heart and mind more than the setting of records and winning of titles. We all want to win matches and championships. These accomplishments can be very positive motivators. But the number of matches we win (or others win) will not get us (or them) through family tragedy or loss. Building people through wrestling has always been the key mission of true leaders in our sport.

6. Create an atmosphere to work and learn in, and don't look at failures as the end. My college coach, the late Dr. Harold Nichols, exhibited this point very well. The setting of the Iowa State University wrestling room was ideal for young men who wished to work and improve themselves as wrestlers. It was a place where you could rub shoulders with others, learn from them, and work as long, hard, and often as you wished.

When we failed it was not the end. Coach Nichols put up with more than I could humor or thought proper at times, but as time went on, I realized what he was doing: he and assistant coach Les Anderson did not drop us when we failed. It was to be taken as a learning experience, and pushed through to reach future success. Many dropped out of the program, but I am not sure they ever left the memory of their coach or his drive to see them succeed. That is a very positive quality for leadership.

7. Don't forget to reward yourself and others. Staying positive, patient, gracious, understanding, and constantly working to improve are all essential. Looking at the positive and acknowledging the success of others will always energize people. Often, a pat on the back can be much more motivating than a kick in the butt.

In conclusion, consider that your own example is perhaps the single most important aspect of leadership. Dr. Albert Schweitzer said that "Example is not the main thing in influencing others, it is the only thing." If there are ideals or qualities you'd like those following you to develop, the best thing you can do is to show them a real-life example of what those qualities look like in practice. Keeping in mind the example you're setting as you follow these leadership pointers will help you to become a good and effective leader... and good, effective leaders are what this world needs, perhaps more than anything else.

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