

University of Denver Men's Ice Hockey Team Captains Report Excerpt

Two of the many observations made about the championship teams included these revelations:

1. The captains had discovered that each of them had different leadership strengths. Therefore they had divided responsibilities with one in charge of locker room speeches, another taking responsibility for on-ice leadership and the third handling problems outside practices and games.
2. The captains also recognized that each of the 23+ players on the team has a distinct personality requiring a different motivational approach. As a result they had again divided the responsibility so that the captain best able to communicate with a particular teammate did so.

Based on leadership principles, the following traits will emerge for a team to succeed:

- Each captain must be able to put the issue of personal performance on the ice in a separate compartment from his role as captain. Sometimes the captain is a star athlete expected to deliver points or goals, and perhaps the accumulation of such scores is important for future career decisions. But to be an effective captain, one must constantly focus on the big picture which means the performance of others in the context of team play.
- The captains must come to realize that a hockey team is no different from any other social organization. It has a complex structure, chain of command and a variety of skill sets among its participants. While dealing with the high expectations set for the team, they had to deal with the wide mood swings from euphoria to bitter deflation.
- Each captain must be aware that the role of leader supersedes that of friend. Leadership is not a popularity contest but rather an effort to be an inspiration and provide motivation for teammates. The hardest moments will occur when someone who is a friend needs counseling.
- Each captain must overcome personal fears of public speaking and one-on-one communication.
- In all sports, defeat is inevitable and, therefore, the leaders of this particular enterprise must be able to deal with it. Even more than that, the occasional poor performance of the captain or a teammate cannot cripple the captain. It's always necessary to move on to the next competition, learning the lessons of defeat and showing an **unstoppable resilience** with growing confidence.
- A leader must understand the basic principle of "recognition." All human beings are motivated by the desire for recognition and, thus, giving recognition – whether in the form of a gesture, smile or spoken word – is the key to getting the best out of any teammate.
- Trust is the reward of a captain. Treating teammates with a caring attitude and with unbiased consistency will go a long way toward opening the doors of communication.
- Finally, a captain must learn that leadership comes from the heart. It is, in essence, the giving of a piece of yourself to your teammates. A captain must sacrifice personal privacy and anonymity. That sacrifice is exactly what we need from leaders who later manage our businesses, towns, states and nation.