

The Seven "C's" of Championship Team Building

Jeff Janssen, Janssen Sports Leadership Center



Talent + Teamwork = Success

Legendary Boston Celtics basketball Coach Red Auerbach once remarked "Some people believe you win with the five best players, but I found out that you win with the five who fit together best." While talent is definitely important to be successful, the most talented team on paper does not always win the tournament or championship.

Talent without teamwork is trouble. I have seen too many teams who had great talent, yet were unable to play to their potential because of selfishness, jealousies, conflict and players who were unable to accept their roles. Likewise I have seen teams with solid but not superior talent, rise to a championship level because of teamwork. Thus, teamwork becomes a sort of "wild card" factor whether you have great or average talent.

In working with many programs across a variety of sports and levels, I have discovered seven important factors that distinguish championship teams. It is these seven areas that I seek to improve when I consult with teams and that you as a coach must continually monitor. As you read the description of the Seven "C's" of Championship Team Building, take a moment to assess how well your team is doing on each of the characteristics.

Seven "C's" of Championship Team Building

1. Common Goal

Championship teams have a singular, common focus. Obviously, for many teams the common goal is to win the conference and/or national championship. This is the team's primary, specified, overt goal and all other goals revolve around it. This goal is firmly embraced by all members of the team, coaching staff and support staff. Everyone understands that this is the direction and destination that the team is moving toward. The players understand that their individual goals must fit within the framework of the team's goal.

2. Commitment

While some seasons may start with the entire team focused on a common goal, rarely do they end up that way. Commitment is probably the single most important factor that differentiates championship teams, coaches, athletes, businesses, schools, marriages (you name it) from the mediocre. It's much too easy to say you want to win the championship and it's a whole other thing to put in the blood, sweat, and tears necessary to pursue a championship - especially when obstacles and adversity strike. Continual commitment to the team's common goal is one of the toughest areas of team building. Championship teams buy into the mission at every level and make the mission their own. The players and coaches work hard and pay their dues because they want to, not because they have to. In addition to their commitment, the team members feel a sense of personal and group accountability. The players have a clear understanding of how their individual choices and decisions influence the collective psyche and success of the team. There is a true sense that if a player is slacking off, she is not just hurting herself but her entire team. The players feel a sense of responsibility and obligation to give it their best.

3. Complementary Roles

Championship teams are comprised of several individuals who willingly take pride in playing a variety of roles. These roles, when played in concert and harmony lead to team success. Thus, each player is assigned specific positions and responsibilities that help determine the entire team's success. While individually they are not solely responsible for the team's success or failure, collectively each role forms a synergistic whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The major difficulties in developing complementary roles is that some roles get more attention and praise thereby making them seem more important. Championship teams however realize that all roles are critical to the overall team's success and willingly accept and value their individual roles.

4. Clear Communication

A fourth characteristic of championship teams is clear communication. Successful teams communicate successfully both on and off the field. The on field communication helps them perform more efficiently and effectively. Players must communicate signs, the number of outs, where to throw the ball and call fly balls to perform successfully. Off the field, players need to continually monitor the team's effectiveness, modify things when necessary, and celebrate successes.

5. Constructive Conflict

Along with effective communication, championship teams have the ability to keep conflict under control. Often, coaches and players are able to use conflict constructively to further develop and strengthen the team. It is not that championship teams never experience conflict, because this is impossible. Instead they are able to handle the conflict they experience and do not let it interfere with the team's common goal. Championship coaches and players make sure that their common goal always takes precedence over any conflict.

6. Cohesion

A sixth characteristic shared by many championship teams is that they genuinely like and respect each other. The players like to spend time with each other outside of scheduled practice and game times. They find reasons to stay together like going to the movies, studying, hanging out, etc. This is not to say that every single player is a part of the group, but that a majority of players tend to socialize together. While it is not absolutely necessary, cohesion is a factor that often will help your team perform at a higher level.

7. Credible Coaching

Finally, it takes a credible coach to develop, orchestrate, and monitor all the other "C's" of Championship Team Building. You as a coach play a critical role in helping the team arrive at a common goal, monitoring and maintaining your players' commitment, assigning and appreciating roles, communicating with the team, keeping conflict under control, and promoting your team's chemistry and cohesion. The team must have a leader who they believe in and has the skills necessary to get the most from the team. A credible coach creates an effective environment that allows the team to perform to their full potential.

As you realize, championship team building is a complex process which must be continually monitored and improved. Regardless of your talent level, invest some time and tap into the power of teamwork to help your team perform at a higher level. By recognizing and working on the Seven "C's" of Championship Team Building you can create a more motivated, committed, and cohesive team.