

Top Qualities Of Highly Effective Debate Coaches

Every kind of team needs a DEDICATED coach/leader to help inspire and motivate them, guide them through challenges, help them learn from successes and failures, and to work with them develop and sharpen essential skills. Debaters have many different skills they need to learn and perfect, so their coach must be an experienced leader who they can look to for help and insight. A debate coach works behind the scenes, helping to prepare debaters for debate events by teaching tactics and strategy to help them improve their argumentation skills. Coaching takes a significant amount of practical knowledge, and while prior debating experience is very helpful it is not essential. A commitment to learning how to be a great debater yourself and an excitement about working with kids is what it really takes – experience is waiting for anyone who wants it.

To get started, here's an excellent video on the “Coaching” style of leadership

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AOTM7KGILA>

A Sports Coaching Analogy

Now let's briefly consider the following excerpt from “Coaching Track & Field Successfully” by Mark Guthrie. Why quote a Track & Field coach? Well, we're hoping the reason will become obvious as soon as you read it:

“Ultimately, your coaching philosophy comprises the values you hold in highest regard and the ones you are comfortable sharing with and teaching to the athletes that make up your team. One such value may be that the actions of one individual can affect the entire team. For example, if one relay member misses one or more practices,

the athlete's absence can not only negatively affect the remaining three athletes in practice, but it may also affect the entire team. If the absence causes the relay to drop the baton during an exchange, the team may therefore lose points in a meet.”

“Most young people function from an individual perspective as opposed to a group perspective; this provides a teaching opportunity for the coach. The values that coaches teach may be few or numerous, but they almost always include such concepts as being on time, working as a group, accepting responsibility, and being good citizens. In short, your philosophy is composed of the same values that govern your own life; therefore, they are easy to teach and easy to use on a daily basis. If you try to become someone that you are not or if you adopt someone else's values, you will have a difficult time representing foreign values in your own actions.”

“Perhaps the most significant difference in the philosophy of a track and field coach versus that of a coach in a more traditional team sport is that in track and field, an athlete can have measurable, quantitative success individually. These individual successes have to be viewed in terms of how they affect the total team performance. For example, you can easily have three or four athletes that are outstanding in one or two events but still have a losing team result. As a track and field coach, your ability to orchestrate, or blend, the egos and accomplishments of individual athletes will be an important ingredient of your philosophy.

Coaches of traditional team sports, on the other hand, usually base their coaching philosophies on the performance of the athletes functioning as a unit. For example, to be successful, all 11 players in football must execute their portion of the play correctly. If one of the 11 athletes fails in his performance, it could directly affect the success of the whole team.”

No additional comment necessary, right? The same lessons and standards apply in both cases – athletics and debating. This is just one example of many remarkable overlaps between sport and debate we keep finding as we research our “Sports & Debate” program and publications. So now let’s look at the specifics of what makes a great debate coach.

Essential Personal Qualities Of Great Debate Coaches

We’ve scoured online advice on for the best thoughts on what makes a great debate coach and rather than throwing a bunch of quotes at you we’ve adapted, re-phrased and edited all these comments into this short riff on coaching, debating, working with kids and having a great time!

A Great Debate Coach: Cares Deeply About People.

Great coaches have a set of incredibly high personal standards and display self-knowledge combined with emotional intelligence and broad vision. They have an ability to focus on important details. They are a creative, innovative lifelong learner and inspire perceptive, intuitive, curious and inquiring behavior in student debaters. They see coaching as a two-way interchange of energy and learning and see coaching as a calling, an art and a discipline.

<https://medium.com/@ronbratt1/essential-qualities-of-a-successful-debate-coach-11c13a3241bb>

A Great Debate Coach: Understands Debating and Leads by Example

To be able to coach effectively, the coach should have, or be able and willing to develop, in-depth understanding of debating from the fundamental skills to advanced tactics and

strategy. Coaches may have experience as a debater, but not all former debaters make good coaches, and not all good coaches are former debaters. Coaches must plan for the school year as well as the summer months of debate camp and training sessions. They must know how debating skills develop, know and be able to explain the rules, and provide a simple, structured environment for debaters to learn, grow and succeed. Plan– Prepare – Practice – Perform –Review - Improve are the essence of good coaching.

Here is a great, short Tom Peters video explaining why, in a leadership role, “It is always showtime.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6foaZH4ZN2w>

A Great Debate Coach: Is A Sponge for Knowledge, A Profound Thinker, And A Visionary

While a good coach probably already knows a great deal about debating, he/she must continue to learn and develop new training techniques. Staying up-to-date and informed of new research, training and everything which supports the coaching process, attending coaching clinics and camps, and seeking out tips from other coaches are a sign of a great coach. Watching videos, reading books and studying periodicals can also be helpful. Attending classes and workshops is a must for any Debate coach who wants to grow and improve.

A Great Debate Coach: Shares the Knowledge & Educates Others

Obtaining knowledge is important but having the confidence to share and seek others' views, especially those outside of the world of Debate, is a key quality. So is being happy to try new things and different ideas in a quest to improve performance. The best coaches clearly

understand they are there to educate the debaters in both self-reliance and teamwork. Most debaters spend a lot of time working on their own, so the more they really understand the full scope of what they are doing and why they are doing it the better they will be able to put their training to work.

Two experienced debate coaches cover their recent experiences coaching online debates during the COVID 19 pandemic. The bottom line – it works great, with some real advantages when done right.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6alzz3kLSQA>

A Great Debate Coach: Is Highly Energized And A Powerful Motivator

The successful debate coach is a motivator with a positive attitude and enthusiasm for the competition and the competitors. The ability to motivate and inspire is part of the formula for success. Getting debaters to believe in themselves and achieve their goals comes far easier to some coaches than others. The coach who can motivate is able to generate the desire to excel in their debaters. Motivation means keeping the practice fun, fresh and challenging. When motivating a player, a good coach stresses trying to reach performance goals, not outcome goals. A coach should make sure that debaters understand that you can completely control your own effort and training, but can't control what your opponent does or the outcome of every debate. Fun and enjoyment are the cornerstones to successful coaching.

A Great Debate Coach: May Already Be In The Building

- Social Studies teachers tend to be very in tune with current events and political issues.
- English teachers are able to deconstruct ideas and point out flaws in logic and style.

- Gifted and Talented teachers are able to differentiate instruction at a high level to help students reach new heights with their potential.
- Resource teachers know how to break down concepts to help students understand ideas, and can help them with organizing their thoughts.
- Media specialists know the ins and outs of research, finding the right supporting material to make an argument compelling.

A Great Debate Coach: Is A Strategic Thinker & Models These Techniques

A debate isn't just about being able to make a good argument; it's about knowing how to state your arguments in a strategic way so you can manage a debate without stumbling. Use strategic thinking to plan out your arguments, as well as prepare your team with all of the necessary public speaking skills. Debates can be fun and exciting, and coaching is a rewarding role. Use these qualities to help develop a fantastic debate team!

This 4 minute on "Where Good Ideas Come From" is a must-see/share for any Debate Coach
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NugRZGDbPFU>

A Great Debate Coach: Knows Each Debater As An Individual Person

Being aware of individual differences in Debaters is an important ingredient in coaching excellence. Direct hard criticism may work for some personalities but could have a devastating effect on others. Individualizing communication and motivation to specific Debater's personalities is vital to successful coaching. Paying attention to the Debater's emotions, strengths and weaknesses are the responsibility of a good coach. Understanding every Debater is different that and has different ways of receiving coaching information is key to good coaching, especially in a team environment.

A Great Debate Coach: Displays Commitment and Clear Passion For Debate

The best coaches are working with debaters because they love debate, not just because the team needed someone to fill the position. Besides being strongly committed to debating success for the team or club, the best coaches display a clear commitment to looking out for the best interest of the individual debaters. Debate coaching in many ways is a full-time second job as top coaches find themselves living and sleeping the art and excitement of coaching.

A Great Debate Coach: Has Broad Experience

Most successful debate coaches have substantial experience working with others, especially with bright motivated young people. In many cases school debate coaches are also teachers, but debate coaches don't need a teaching degree. Experience is valuable, because you need to have a good understanding of how debate works, what skills and techniques are used when making a certain kind of argument, and how different elements of style and presentation are typically judged at a debate event. The better prepared you are, and the more practical experience you have, the better you can prepare your debaters for success.

A Great Debate Coach: Is an Effective Communicator & Teacher

An effective coach communicates well and exudes credibility, competence, respect and authority and is able to explain ideas clearly. Clear communication means setting defined goals, giving direct feedback and reinforcing the key messages. Acknowledging success is also essential for good communication. Language is a key part of coaching and keeping everything simple and easily understood is a sign of a successful coach.

Effective communication boils down to learning how to put yourself in other people's shoes. Understanding this and applying it in practice within leadership really reinforces group members' belief in a leader. A leader who has shown they understand and tries to meet the needs of its members will often translate into a team that tries to meet their leader's needs better too.

While it's true that becoming a great leader stems hugely from experience, maturity, and many many mistakes, there are many great attributes around leadership that can be taught from a younger age, through other means.

This video offers an interesting research-based take on effective adult-teen communications.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=138&v=y6wfl0HvgWU

A Great Debate Coach: Is a Good Listener

Arguably the most important part of communicating effectively is listening. A coach should be a compassionate ear and should welcome the students' comments, questions and input. The effective coach will actively seek out information from their students, not just provide information to them, and creates an environment where students are encouraged to present ideas and thoughts to the coach. Finally, the good coach will be flexible and will use player feedback to modify the training plan if necessary.

This short video is a simple gut-level discussion of what makes "Good Listening" so good.

https://ed.ted.com/best_of_web/foptnjVE

A Great Debate Coach: Is Disciplined, Strong in Character and Integrity

Debaters need to adhere to a reasonable set of rules both on and off stage and if these are ignored the coach is responsible for discipline. Trust between Debaters and coach is of paramount importance at all times and essential for successful coaching – trust comes from the quality of the actions from both coach and player alike. An effective coach clearly states a code of conduct up front and adheres to it. When violations do occur, discipline should follow. We know that for discipline to effectively change behavior, it must be mild, prompt and consistent and must be clearly directed at strengthening individual integrity, values and personal growth.

