
THE BIG SHIFT: Unlock Your Team's Potential by Creating Player-Led Teambuilding

Dr. Cory L. Dobbs

President, The Academy for Sport Leadership

INTRODUCTION: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

The driving assumptions are that a player-led process will lead to a (1) collectively, (2) reflectively, and (3) relationally smarter team; that all student-athletes are capable of learning to lead; and that team leadership is grounded in a team learning together.

The concept “player-led team” conjures up a narrow-range of responses that, more often than not, include a healthy dose of skepticism. Player-led, inferring leadership by the players, is one of those slippery concepts that every coach knows about but finds difficult to deploy. However, the reality is that the underlying forces of teamwork are player-centric and enable and nurture the co-creation process of teambuilding. This is why coaches today are interested in exploring the learning aspects for student-athletes—learning to lead self, lead others, and lead with others. The driving assumptions are that a player-led process will lead to a collectively, reflectively, and relationally smarter team; that all student-athletes are capable of learning to lead; and that team leadership is grounded in a team learning together.

Years ago when I was finishing up my doctoral research, I had a meeting with one of my advisors. He began the encounter by asking me,

“Cory what is the best way to learn something?” Having just completed a lengthy research project grounded in experiential learning, I said confidently, “The best way to learn something is to experience it yourself.” My advisor turned to me and replied: “No, the best way to learn something is to teach it to someone else.” Yet, over the next couple of years, I still believed experiential learning to be superior to teaching as a way of learning. Until something happened that changed the way I thought about peer leadership and teambuilding.

A young up-and-coming coach asked me to observe her team over a series of practices. At a tense point during the final practice the team’s last player on the bench halted practice to help another player execute a drill properly. During this “incident” she spoke boldly to her teammates, inviting them to “do whatever it takes” to execute with precision. She went as

far as telling her teammates to “stop practice if you need to.” Did I just discover a leadership secret?

For student-athletes, speaking honestly to peers about interpersonal and performance issues is downright terrifying. I have seen student-athletes literally get sick to their stomachs with fear before going into a team building session where they are expected to lead a difficult discussion with teammates. It’s hard for most people to confront a peer who has failed to meet expectations. And far too often personality conflicts or lack of trust damage relationships by being swept under the carpet.

With the experience of the up-and-coming coach in mind, I began researching and practicing peer leadership. The outcomes that emerged from peer leadership were initially a bit mysterious. Like a diligent detective I kept searching. What I discovered was that the real mystery is this: Why do so few coaches experiment with new ways of thinking?

For the early part of my career with The Academy for Sport Leadership, I wrote, researched, and worked with sports teams to create better team leaders, mostly helping prepare team captains. I was brimming with good intentions, but I never felt comfortable with the evidence—the results of the team captains. The effective team captain was a rarity; most of the leadership of the teams I’d spent time with was still provided by the coach and his or her staff with team captains expected to lead in the shallow matters.

Over the next few years, as I researched and practiced player-led team development, I encountered stiff resistance from many coaches. One superstar coach bluntly informed me that players should have no influence on the direction or decisions of the team. He carefully imparted the “my way or the highway” approach to coaching. “The players play, and the coaches coach,” he said, “and if any player thinks he can coach, well, we take care of that rather quickly.” After conducting a debrief with his student-athletes it was clear the players had little respect for the coach and did only enough to get by.

As I began working with more sports teams interested in player-led leadership, the evidence that emerged was positive. With training,

student-athletes were taking initiative and exercising resourcefulness in their efforts to team build. Collaboration and cooperation, not command and control, proved to be the most effective strategy for increasing player leadership performance.

I felt optimistic. I discovered that teaching student-athletes a leadership framework distinguished cohesive teams from dysfunctional teams. I came to the realization that the moment a player engaged in the process of teaching a teammate, the dynamics of the moment changed. The act, whether small or large, impacted the participants in a positive way. I was witness to numerous small actions being amplified and creating a whole new perspective. I was compelled to investigate the hidden dynamic behind this behavior.

The best explanation is that the players value learning by peer-teaching. Sure, experience is vital to the process. It provides the raw material. But when a student-athlete engaged in peer teaching—a kind of peer leadership—something extraordinary happened. Those doing the teaching exhibited hyper-engagement with the context and its momentary needs. And those being coached acted in a grateful manner to their peer teacher. When a player is *willing* and *able* to share knowledge or insight with another player, they transform the moment, the teammate, and the team.

The end goal of player-led teamwork is for the student-athlete to learn, to grow, and to nourish the teambuilding and team leadership processes. This article has a simple aim: to get you to look at new ways of thinking not as threats, but as opportunities to learn; specifically, to get you to think about player leadership and teambuilding. You will learn that coaching for leadership is a healthy shift that can make the difference between an average team experience or a transformative experience. You will also learn that teambuilding is a complex co-creative process and you will come to appreciate how teamwork intelligence can guide the leadership development of every student-athlete.

THE QUEST FOR OPTIMAL TEAM LEADERSHIP

This chapter is for those coaches who want to coach for leadership. Specifically, it is for those who want to become more effective at

But when a student-athlete engaged in peer teaching—a kind of peer leadership—something extraordinary happened.

building their team’s capabilities by actually developing the leadership and teambuilding talents of their roster of student-athletes. The basic idea is simple. Take the time to develop and grow the leadership qualities and teamwork intelligence of the student-athletes. To do this requires a deliberate effort from the coaching staff—help guiding each student-athlete to seek out leadership opportunities and how to learn from their experience. The desired outcome is a player-led culture, one in which the players take a hyper-active role in building the team.

I define player-led teambuilding as the practice of a purpose-driven group of athletes self-organizing to build a team through shared leadership—players leading players. This involves a radical shift in the ways players and coaches interact socially and interpersonally.

Today, the idea of player-led teams is gaining steam, and for good reason. Legions of coaches are changing things up because team culture has emerged as job one. There is no factor more important for a coach than creating an environment where all student-athletes can grow and develop leadership skills and teambuilding knowledge and capabilities. It is equally important that student-athletes have a pathway—ownership and autonomy—to contribute their people skills. When coaches refocus on the interpersonal potential of team member attitudes and actions, they unleash untapped and overlooked capabilities. From this new vantage point, coaches gain a whole new perspective about how to foster high achievement drive and motivation within the team environment.

What makes player-led teambuilding unique is its underlying goal: to help student-athletes to see more in themselves than they currently believe possible. It’s about helping student-athletes climb out of their self-imposed view of “I’m not a leader,” to embrace the idea of having a legitimate role to play in building the team. It’s about teaching student-athletes to lead and to follow—knowing how and when to move between the two.

Here’s the voice of a player-led team member: “We came together, and we understand that it can’t just be the coaches on us anymore. We have to hold each other accountable. We say things like, ‘We’re our brothers’ keeper.’ We have to take that into heart, and we have to mean that every time we step on the field.”

Of course, it is seldom that easy. If it were, most coaches would quickly integrate a player-led mindset into everything they do as a team. If you’re frantically searching for a quick-fix method of leader development, this method is

not for you. As you will see, utilizing player-leadership is challenging, but worthwhile.

<p style="text-align: center;">IT’S COMPLICATED!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Coaches fear the messy unknown-Coaches fear losing control-Players fear vulnerability-Players fear failure <p style="text-align: right;">Exhibit 1</p>

I define player-led teambuilding as the practice of a purpose-driven group of athletes self-organizing to build a team through shared leadership—players leading players. This involves a radical shift in the ways players and coaches interact socially and interpersonally. There’s a distinct change of gear from the coach with “My way or the highway” control to maximizing player performance and inspiration through the way team members interact with and depend on each other. The purpose of teambuilding and team leadership is to create an environment in which every member is fully engaged. It is about *the players* creating a place in which they perform their best—that it is player-to-player relations that unleash the natural flow of relational energy student-athletes bring to the team. This represents a huge shift from the two-team captain tradition.

In the role of team leader, the student-athlete must shift his focus from a self-centered perspective to a team-centric mindset; one that highlights the interdependent connections with teammates. When this happens team members take each other’s well-being into account and build relationships of mutual respect, honor, loyalty, and understanding; where each player contributes to each other’s growth and development and the fulfillment of each other’s hopes, dreams, and aspirations.

The coaching role and goal is to *enlighten* and *empower* student-athletes to create an environment in which *they* challenge, communicate with, lead, and inspire one another. While coaches organize the team, it is the players that infuse the team with purpose, dignity, and significance. The cornerstone of a player-led way of coaching is the belief that all student-athletes have untapped leadership and teambuilding potential. However, achieving pure player-leadership proves elusive for many coaches because they have no way of knowing whether or not they are effective at developing team leaders. To start, they need a way to figure out how to get student-athletes working together in a fundamentally different way.

My research efforts with my company, The Academy for Sport Leadership, have opened my mind to what it takes for coaches to coach for leadership and players to learn and use teamwork intelligence effectively and efficiently. The primary problem is that coaches think about leadership too narrowly. They treat leadership as a trait one either possesses or lacks. Seldom does a coach consider leadership development as a set of skills to teach. For both, coaches and players, I have tried and tested various combinations of skills and techniques which have proven to increase individual and team performance potential.

Creating player-led teambuilding does not depend on the student-athlete possessing the right traits; rather, it demands that the coach teach leadership in a way that eventually leads to an optimal path for team leadership. The key to moving to a new leadership operating system depends on establishing new norms and behaviors. This requires a Big Shift—creating a new infrastructure designed to foster a learning oriented culture. Meaningful changes take place by establishing what the team’s members should stop doing, keep doing, and start doing.

A LEADERSHIP SYSTEM UPGRADE

To fully grasp why a Big Shift is necessary, we must understand why coaches tend to operate reflexively when presented with teambuilding issues. At the core of the Big Shift is a set of assumptions and propositions coaches make about student-athletes and their leadership capabilities and potential. It is essential that every coach look into the mirror and question their assumptions. Here are some questions to get you started:

1. Do you believe that student-athletes can lead their peers?
2. Do you believe that student-athletes seek responsibility *and* accountability?
3. Do you believe that student-athletes respect and respond to peer leadership?
4. Do you believe that student-athletes naturally want to learn how to lead?
5. Do you believe that only coaches are responsible for the leadership success of the team?
6. Do you believe that student-athletes need to be controlled and their behavior modified to fit the needs of the team?
7. Do you believe that without control by coaches, student-athletes are passive?

At the core of any theory of leadership are assumptions about motivation and organization. Almost all teams approach the design of a student-athlete leadership system by choosing a select few players to be team captains. The primary assumption undergirding the two (or three if you insist) team captain system is that leaders are born—they possess traits that naturally make them better leaders. However, if we are serious about unleashing the potential of each player to contribute to leadership and teambuilding, we must commit to finding a better way of developing team leaders.

An upgrade of a leadership system entails mutual learning—coaches and players—that generates a shift in values, assumptions, and behaviors, so that leadership is invested in the full team, rather than just a few team captains.

The Big Shift is a new way of structuring team leadership by distributing leadership responsibilities—a true paradigm shift. The shift entails moving from the underlying unilateral command and control structure, towards a relationship-driven structure that engages all team members in leadership activities. This is the essence of a player-led system. In order for the shift to player-led teambuilding to reach its full potential, the shift must involve a new way to define leadership roles, responsibilities, and accountability.

The first role to be adopted is that of the coach as a leadership educator. The foundation of becoming a leadership educator is a growth mindset and the expanded teaching ability of coaching for leadership. Coaching for leadership is far more than just assigning team captains and occasionally meeting with them to ensure the team is “running smoothly.” The coaching for leadership coach is comfortable with distributing leadership to his or her student-athletes and knows what to look for and what kind of feedback is likely to be helpful developing team leadership. Dobbs (2017) has described this as a requirement for the coach making the big shift to developing a leader in every locker.

To many coaches, the idea of “a leader in every locker” sounds unusual, suspicious, and is met with deep skepticism. That’s because the traditional team captaincy approach has seldom been challenged. Mostly, it’s simply been accepted as the “way life is.” If you dig deep you’ll find, for most coaches, letting go of control is hard to do because they feel

Creating player-led teambuilding does not depend on the student-athlete possessing the right traits; rather, it demands that the coach teach leadership in a way that eventually leads to an optimal path for team leadership.

responsible for the outcomes of all decisions. Consequently the coach finds himself or herself focusing exclusively on short-term task-oriented results at the expense of the more complex longer-term relational and learning goals.

The next generation of student-athletes won't develop as leaders unless given opportunities to learn, to think, and to grow into a leadership role. For this to happen, coaches need to reconfigure many of their essential coaching habits and practices. For example, coaches will need to, but likely struggle with, the communication challenge of shifting from mostly "telling" players what to do, to knowing when to "ask" players for input "Do as I say," is an unwritten code of coaching. Telling is so ingrained that we don't think about its effect. However, the *right mix* of telling and asking is crucial to creating a we-centric culture.

The next generation of student-athletes won't develop as leaders unless given opportunities to learn, to think, and to grow into a leadership role.

To design a player-led teambuilding system requires coaches to undergo a heart-set and mindset transformation; a logical and emotional shift that changes the way a coach thinks about teambuilding. Making this shift means more than just transferring a few decisions to the players. The more forward-thinking coaches see the limitations of the traditional "control" model and are on board with the need for change. They embrace change as the very essence of a transformational coaching journey—they have clarity and confidence about altering *what is* and adapting to *what can be*.

The Big Shift demands deep sustainable change. It's rooted in a transformation of the coach's attitudes, assumptions, and of course, behavior. They do this by building positive relationships, providing emotional support, and fostering respect; by reorienting how the coaches and players work together to build a potent learning environment. It follows that, while all coaches seek to improve, deep change must be driven by a tolerance for ambiguity and acceptance of uncertainty. Unlike established routines, ambiguity is part-and-parcel of significant change because you simply cannot predict and control everything involved in the chain of events of complex change.

Yet, invariably, something special happens to teams that struggle through the change process. Players and coaches must depend on and trust each other in new ways. Teams that work through the early phases of change begin to think, feel, and act in new ways, fostering an attitude of "we are in this together."

BREAKING THROUGH THE COMFORT ZONE

Before you tackle your change effort, take a moment and ask yourself the following questions: What is likely to happen if you teach all student-athletes to become team leaders? How do you install a leadership development process? How does a leader in every locker threaten your leadership? Is this too disruptive for coaches? Student-athletes?

In my workshops, I ask coaches to identify and list some potential problems and possible risks that might emerge if they are to go "all in" on creating a player-led teambuilding team. I encourage you and your staff to spend twenty minutes exploring and examining potential problems and possible risks.

Potential Problems Possible Risks

Effective coaching for leadership is about how coaches and team members come to see each other as an integral part of the teambuilding processes. A person's performance will always be consistent with what they internally believe they *can* or *should* be producing. And a major component of one's belief in his or her leadership potential is built upon the impact of internalization of what influential others—teammates and coaches—think of him or her.

Let me state the obvious; leadership and teambuilding are very much a "we thing." It's a matter of how "we" develop solidarity and unity, empathy, and trust. The stubborn resistance that only a select few players are capable of leading is a major barrier to student-athletes becoming team leaders.

It's important to note here that what you think and believe about student-athletes and leadership matters. Your sincere belief that they can lead and that now is the time to become a team leader will powerfully influence your student-athletes acceptance and adoption of the practices of team leadership.

DRILLING DOWN

Many coaches hold to the assumption that student-athletes are unable to effectively lead their peers. This concern is made explicit as student-athletes typically display limited self-awareness, leadership, and interpersonal communication and conflict management skills.

Without much background and understanding coaches are deeply skeptical about player-led team development. Because of this reluctance most advocates of teaching student-athletes to lead, be they coaches or administrators, focus on the very narrow perspective of character-based training.

Today, the educational landscape has changed. Many coaches are investing time and money to increase their capacity to lead. And many schools and universities are developing curricular approaches to developing coaches, athletes, and sport leaders. However, while resources abound, the real challenge is change, individual and organizational.

Resistance to Change

Why is it so hard to lose weight? Why is it so easy to jump to conclusions? It's because of our habits; our patterns of thinking formed over a long period of time. Let's face it, we are creatures of habit. And change isn't easy. Most of us are unwilling to change until we encounter a disorienting dilemma that forces us to change. And even then, desire and motivation to change are seldom enough. So, what if it's necessary for you to change in order to unlock the potential of your student-athletes?

No coach needs convincing that *improvement* and *changes* are necessary constants of building a successful program. As such, it is of vital importance that coaches "manage" the change process. It is their responsibility to either manage the process by chance, do little planning, or by choice via deliberate planning and demanding execution.

Very briefly, the core problem of resistance to change must be surfaced. The first step the coach must take is to surface his or her attitude towards the idea of players as participants in the leadership processes.

Surface Your Attitudes

Attitudes are important. You may be tempted to think that your attitude is not the problem, or at least justified given the fact that few student-athletes are proven leaders. However, you would be mistaken. Are you willing to change your attitude if necessary? Okay then, ask your student-athletes if you are destroying their desire to lead, or denying their growth and development. If there is a hint that you might be destroying or denying, take it as a sign that you need to surface your assumptions

(For example, young people don't know how to lead) and decide if a player-led process is for you.

On the other side of the attitude ledger are the positive attitudes of creating a student-athlete's potential and fostering the realization of one's leadership potential. If you already possess a growth mindset, continue along your current path. My guess is you'll enjoy the journey embedded within the Seven Shifts of Perspective and Responsibility. However, while you may be embedded into your change project, I can guarantee your student-athletes will need you to play a vital role in their transition to leadership roles and responsibilities. That role is to teach and coach for leadership.

FOUR FORCEFUL ATTITUDES

I have always been deeply moved by outstanding achievement, especially in the face of adversity, and saddened by wasted potential. –Carol Dweck, author of Mindset

Destroying Leadership Potential: You can quickly kill any confidence a young student-athlete might have by being overly critical or condescending.

Denying Leadership Potential: When you restrain and suppress the emerging voice of a team leader you are denying them a growth and learning opportunity.

Creating Leadership Potential: To make the transition to a leadership role easier and effective provide opportunities for each player to explore and develop a leadership mindset.

Realizing Leadership Potential: When you encourage and build up the student-athlete as a team leader you inspire them to do more.

EXHIBIT 2

Surface Your Mental Models

If your goal is significant change, and my guess is it is, you must examine your existing mental models. Thomas Kuhn, the author of the disruptive book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, provided clarity on the change process with his finding that almost every significant breakthrough in science is first a break from tradition. A "paradigm shift" Kuhn pointed out, involves significant change with the old way of thinking. Stephen Covey, author and educator, fine-tuned the capacity of paradigms when he declared, "If you want small changes,

Let's face it, we are creatures of habit. And change isn't easy. Most of us are unwilling to change until we encounter a disorienting dilemma that forces us to change.

work on your behavior, if you want quantum-leap changes, work on your paradigms.”

Let’s take a closer look at your coaching self in the mirror. Beneath your inescapable good looks and youthful charm churns a hidden portrait of stories, values, assumptions, ideas, and experiences woven into your unique and idiosyncratic mental models. The interplay of your internal models elicit ways you will apprehend your world, as well as comprehend—or make sense of—your socially constructed world. Understanding how you relate to the world around you is the foundation of self-awareness. Further, how you gather information via your mental models and how you process that information can limit, or expand, the way you get things done, and negatively, or positively impact the ways in which you interact with others, and affect your judgment and decision-making.

It’s estimated that two-thirds of change programs get bogged down half-way through and lose whatever momentum remains.

Commit to Change

Let’s get beyond the superficial rah-rah. Most change initiatives fail. And if player-led teambuilding is a flavor of the month, it too will fail. In the quest to meet the challenges of change, it’s crucial for all participants—players and coaches—to make a total commitment to the change effort. There is no one way to design a player-led team to achieve its goals. Just as every team has its own culture and practices, there are viable alternatives to the way in which you design a player-led team.

A great educator once said, “There is a world of difference between studying what leadership is, and studying how it functions in the real world.” Real-world change, for individuals and teams, is difficult to sustain. It’s estimated that two-thirds of change programs get bogged down and half-way through lose whatever momentum remains. The framework of the Seven Shifts represents a starting point for building a high-performing team; enabling coaches and student-athletes that care deeply to build a new type of team.

THE BIG SHIFT: SEVEN SHIFTS OF PERSPECTIVE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Shift #1: from Order Giver to Opportunity Creator

This shift is vital to the other six shifts. It promotes the transformational rule that coaches must first change themselves to change their teams. Here the shift takes the coach from a

classic results-driven command and control model to a blend with a relationship-driven model focused on learning and maturing. A cautionary note: The traditional leadership operating system is and has been mostly hierarchical. It’s about a coach *giving* orders and players *taking* orders. But the opportunity creator is different; he or she embraces a shared leadership in which they “teach a team to fish.” This transformational shift identifies and makes each participant’s strength productive.

Shift #2: from Seeing Student-Athletes as They are, to What They can Become

Experience has taught me that few things help young people grow more than to give them responsibility and to let them know you trust them. This shift is about believing so deeply in your student-athletes that their awareness of your belief in them inspires them to rise to new heights of individual and team growth. This shift sets the stage for recognizing contributions rather than focusing on shortcomings. When you do this you demonstrate that leadership is a relationship; that by changing your mindset you are able to become the kind of person that others want to follow.

Shift #3: from Fixed Perspective to Growth Mindset

Leadership can be taught. And learned! Carol Dweck, Stanford University Professor, has spent her entire career studying human potential. She has found that there are two main mindsets through which we navigate life: growth and fixed. The fixed mindset is seldom open for learning (most ideas are written in stone), whereas the growth mindset allows for failure and stumbling through new experiences in the expectation of learning, growing, and always improving performance. Coaches and players come equipped with either a fixed or growth mindset. However, dedicated to the notion of progress, the growth mindset can and should be nurtured.

Shift #4: from Self-Preservation to Fostering Horizontal Teamwork

An argument that has raged since the first group of hunters gathered on the Savanna: Is there one best style of leadership? Or is leadership different for different people in different situations? The purpose of this shift is to expand the focus on leadership as a relationship.

It is abundantly clear that when a coach fosters a psychologically safe environment, they can create superior teambuilding culture.

This shift involves adjusting the status of player to coach; from the traditional arms-length to hands-on. The challenge of shifting to a horizontal relationship is like a fish out of water. As one veteran coach told me, “It’s difficult for us coaches to really serve our players with leadership opportunities because we’re anxious about our own performance.” Another coach said “I know I am the problem, but I don’t know any other way to lead.”

As one veteran coach told me, “It’s difficult for us coaches to really serve our players with leadership opportunities because we’re anxious about our own performance.” Another coach said “I know I am the problem, but I don’t know any other way to lead.”

This shift can hit hard as reality intrudes. Coaches are expected to make some *sacrifices*, such as spending valuable time striving to understand and empathize with players. And *serve*—such as asking a player what he or she might need during a team meeting. Here humility becomes a driving force, putting ego in its place.

Shift #5: from Directive Leadership to Participative

Most coaches initially balk at the idea of shared leadership because they desperately want to cling to total control. The directive style of leadership is built on a unilateral control mindset and has a rich narrative in the history of leadership. Often the hard-nosed heavy-handed coach emerges as a hero only to solidify the cultivation of the directive style of leadership.

In sport, as in the military, there is a traditional concept that a chain of command, based on power and authority, is a preferred style for efficient leadership. The chain of command is a hierarchical structure that reinforces “power over” rather than “power with” relationships highlighted by the status of superiority (strength) over inferiority (weakness). Often those who lack status lack value. While unilateral control is efficient, it is only adequate when it comes to long-term effectiveness. Unfortunately, this system of leadership has many unintended consequences.

If we are to train student-athletes as leaders, coaches must adjust the relational power gap when it fits with the situation. Leadership is grounded in the fact that it is exercised as a way of *influencing* a course of events, to include follower behaviors and a desired outcome. The emphasis is on influence as the tool of persuasion.

The goal of this shift is to teach the emerging leaders how to interact more positively with others. Directive leadership has its place in the tool belt of the leader. It’s just that the player-led leadership invites participants to solve problems, resolve conflicts, mend relationships, and rebuild trust. Using influence, players have a better chance of addressing these issues successfully.

Shift #6: from Team Captains to Shared Leadership

The peer-based shared leadership approach is a relationship-focused method of teaching student-athletes how to lead and how to build a team. It posits that leaders emerge when they are prepared *and* when the opportunity arises. Team leaders are able to see the big picture and willing to focus on interactions between and among all the participants in the environment. Everyone participates (A Leader in Every Locker). For that reason, leadership must be taught. And just as importantly—learned.

Think of it this way: Shared, or collaborative, leadership is like a serious jazz band. Leaders emerge, submerge, and play off of one another. A quote from a member of a team I worked with recently sums it up: “It seemed like whenever we needed someone to lead, somebody did it.” No one was forced to make a contribution. Rather, they did so because they knew that it was to the team’s benefit as well as their own.

Shift #7: from Coercion & Compliance to Commitment

I’m guessing you are very familiar with the leadership tools of the “stick and the carrot.” The carrot (a reward) is used as a tool to externally motivate a person. If the player wants the carrot bad enough (usually playing time), the pleasure it might bring, he or she will do whatever is necessary. Coercion is effective when offering something a person wants. And the stick (a threat), well, the stick is used to get compliance. The stick, can and will be used as tool of punishment. If a player wants to avoid the pain of being “hit” with the stick, they’ll comply with the leader’s request. Use of threat and punishment to effect behavioral change can work in the short-term; the coach gets the behavior he or she wants. But the coach that overuses the carrot *and* stick find themselves with very few student-athletes wanting much of anything to do with them. Can you say rebel?

Deep changes, the kind necessary for the Big Shift, are difficult, if not impossible to achieve through coercion. Effective coaches learn to deal with the whole person in order to gain their commitment. Let me share with you organizational development expert Dick Beckhard's wisdom: "People do not resist change; they resist being changed." Add to this, psychology professor and author of *Why We Do What We Do*, Edward Deci's game-changing idea: "Instead of asking, How can I motivate People? We should be asking, how can I create the conditions within which people will motivate themselves?" There you have it, profound changes in how to change the way student-athletes think, what they believe, and how they see and act in the world, are more likely to be open for change as a means of motivation by commitment.

Deep changes, the kind necessary for the Big Shift, are difficult, if not impossible to achieve through coercion.

So there you go. You now have seven teambuilding and leadership shifts to work on. Be deliberate and intense.

Note: The Seven Shifts are covered in greater detail in Coaching for Leadership (Dobbs, 2017).

CONCLUSION

So much has changed in the years since I launched The Academy for Sport Leadership. And I'm not talking about sports. Take as "Exhibit A," the growth of Amazon—now the largest retailer on earth. Amazon's growth has pushed them in front of Wal-Mart. The significance is that the consumer, via Amazon, has become the hunter. Juxtapose this with Wal-Mart, where the customer is the hunted. Now that's a Big Shift!

What else has changed? Take a glance into the modern workplace. More organizations than ever before expect leadership from their workers.

Review the mission and vision statements of your neighborhood school. You'll find reference to the school teaching student's Twenty-First Century leadership. Society is shifting to a new stage of development, with leadership front and center.

Your student-athletes are, literally, products of their environment. This means they've

grown up in a world in which choice is paramount and leadership is an expectation. Visit a third grade classroom and you'll see how these elements are sprouting. Every school today is student-centered.

My hope is that coaches will be concerned enough to ask the vital question, "and so what?" Questions are often the starting point. Questions make things happen. Change is the theme of this article. Primarily because, you, me, and the next guy, need clarity of direction, sharper focus, and executable learning opportunities in order to maximize and embed sustainable change in the team role of leader.

Player-led teambuilding sounds like a grandiose idea. Maybe it is. But it does look to me like it's here to stay. My goal with this article is to push you to think beyond the conventional wisdom. We know intuitively that we need to shift our thinking from unilateral control to shared leadership—a shift that will have a transformative impact on you and your team. The essence of a player-led effort is to expand the potential of all participants in your program.

No matter the level of play, teamwork and player leadership have to be a teambuilding imperative—a core part of a team's collective purpose. If players and coaches successfully drive team development they'll establish a teamwork culture that enables student-athletes to learn and successfully apply leadership principles.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Cory Dobbs, President of The Academy for Sport Leadership, is a leadership performance coach and team consultant. Cory's 20-plus years of leadership thinking, writing, researching, practicing, and coaching are reflected in his books and curricular resources. His focus has been to help coaches become leadership educators and build high-performing team environments. Cory has worked with professional, collegiate, and scholastic coaches and athletes. As a consultant and trainer, Dr. Dobbs has worked with *Fortune 500* organizations such as American Express, Honeywell, and Avnet, as well as medium and small businesses. Cory has taught leadership, management, organizational behavior, and adult learning at Northern Arizona University, Grand Canyon University, and Ohio University.

The Academy for Sport Leadership's Coaching for Leadership Approach

Our approach is rooted in the belief that leadership is a powerful force for shaping a team's culture, influencing the growth and development of student-athletes, and those coaches that practice deep leadership stand above and apart from others in the profession.

REACHING YOUR POTENTIAL

So, what price are you willing to pay? Time? Resources? Energy and commitment? Money?

ABOUT DR. DOBBS COACHING PROGRAMS

- Advanced Leadership Program
- High-Performance Leadership Program
- The Executive Leadership Program

Dr. Cory Dobbs' Leadership Performance Coaching program is designed to empower you with the focus, coaching, and accountability you need to reach your potential. Cory will challenge and support you in obtaining meaningful and lasting change, turning you into a high performing leader. To reach your best, to attain elite status, demands that you pay a price. Are you ready and willing to tackle this rare opportunity to work one-on-one with Cory? Challenge yourself to a life-changing adventure in leadership development and teamwork intelligence. Become a great coach, build a great team.

Dr. Cory Dobbs

cory@sportleadership.com

(623) 330.3831 (call or text)

The Academy for Sport Leadership is a national leader in leadership resources for coaches and student-athletes.



www.sportleadership.com