

Developing Tomorrow's Leaders:

Teach your cheerleaders strong leadership traits and positive communication skills

As cheerleading coaches, we need to center our focus not only on developing technical skills but also leadership traits. With the popularity of competition, often the leadership side takes a backseat. School coaches need to place equal emphasis on both aspects: skill development and leadership. To reestablish the importance of the leadership side of cheer, set aside part of every practice schedule to work on the following elements:

organization, follow-through and communication skills.

If you truly want to build a reliable, hard working team, they all must share in the responsibilities of leadership. Your job, as their coach, is to give them all opportunities to learn how to be strong leaders. Establish a list of tasks that need to be handled as part of the cheerleading team and then choose leaders. Assign one head chairperson and up to three people to co-leader per position. Emphasize that each position and task is equally important. Assign your athletes responsibilities with guidelines and deadlines.

Below is a list of possible jobs:

- **Communication Leader**: She develops a phone tree list of all cheerleaders' cell and home phone numbers. She also gathers their email addresses and sends out weekly reminders and newsletters.
- **Game Leader**: She makes game plans, leads warm-up and stretching prior to the start of the game, calls chants, and critiques/evaluates performances/games.
- **Team Support Leader**: She develops ways to encourage and support the sports teams.
- **School Spirit Leader**: She plans events to involve students in the promotion of school spirit and sportsmanship.
- **Practice Leader**: She leads warm-up and stretching, finds and plans new conditioning and team bonding games.
- **Community Relations Leader**: She is in charge of community service projects, reports to school and school district newspaper, and i.e. promotes good PR for the cheer team.
- **Spirit Leader**: She develops team morale by passing out inspirational quotes, good luck posters, plan team parties, treats and oversees secret pal project.

- **Competition Leader:** She passes out and collects all paperwork, and finds directions to the competition, and leads the warm-ups at the competition.
- **Photography/Video Leader:** She takes photos and or videos during practices, games, community service projects and competitions

Guide them through the process helping them to learn what is needed to be a good leader. Assign specific tasks with a timeline. Use the enclosed **Job Task Form**. The coach manages and they lead. Set aside 15 minutes of each practice to review their responsibilities so that all jobs get done. Together the team develops pride and confidence because everyone feels they are a necessary part of the group. Everyone shares in both the responsibilities of the team and in the leadership to make sure it all gets done.

In order to be strong leaders, cheerleaders must have good communication skills. They need a clear, concise way to express the desires, thoughts and opinions. In Bobbi DePorter's book called, "*The 7 Biggest Teen Problems and How to Turn Them Into Strengths*", she offers a communication system called Open the Front Door.

OTFD or Open the Front Door.

In this system,

O = Observe

T = Thought

F = Feelings

D = Desire

Here's how it works: in any interpersonal communication, especially when there is tension or the potential for conflict, start with sharing what it is you have **Observed**, then the **Thought** that accompanies this Observation. Then, state the **Feeling** you have about this and finally ask what it is you want to happen (**Desire**). As for any new skill, it must be practiced in order to truly be a perfected skill. Have each cheerleaders practice this technique in an easy, non-threatening situation. Use this technique every day in communicating all situations that occur during cheerleading. OTFD framework helps cheerleaders to step back from the emotional heat of the moment to gather their thoughts and feelings and find a way to communicate them.