

## Credible Sources

### The bedrock of coaching is the individual's credibility

By Dr. Jay Martin, Editor, Soccer Journal

Coaching credibility...so important and yet so difficult to define. Thanks to the U.S. Olympic Committee and the U.S. Olympic e-zine, Dr. Sean McCann and Dr. Gregory Dale talk about credibility at length in this issue. It may be the single most important factor in coaching success. But, what is it? We have all heard the phrase "a players' coach" or "be yourself" when talking about coaching. That sounds credible...and it is. But, what is it? How does it apply to you?

Thirty years ago here was no problem. A coach was a coach. By virtue of his/her position, there were no problems, no question of authority and no question about who was boss. But today? Parents and players both question the coach -every day, every decision. So what is important for the coach today? How can he/she become credible in the eyes of peers, players and parents of the players? The two aforementioned articles offer great advice for gaining and maintaining credibility. But, they miss one important factor. Every good coach... *"is what he/she is."*

There is no shortage of coaching material that suggests that all coaches remain within their own personality, do what they do best, do it how they do it and not try to be Alex Ferguson. Be yourself. But it is not easy. Staying true to your personality, as a coach, is the most difficult part of coaching. Many coaches, once in a position of leadership, change. They change into what *they think a coach should be...how they think a coach should act.* That is a big mistake and leads to loss of credibility.

In the late 1990's the Gallup Foundation engaged in a study of leadership. The Disney Corporation asked Gallup to define leadership. What is leadership? Who are leaders? What do they do? How do they do it? Can we create leaders? Since all coaches are in a position of leadership, the results are important and significant to all who coach.

The results were very interesting. In summary Gallup found that the best leaders:

- • Have a firm belief in their talent
- • Study other successful leaders
- • Focus on excellence
- • Move (accentuate) from their strengths
- • Measure performance improvement
- • Build team synergy; partnerships to share strengths

There is really not much new there. We have all read about leaders in this periodical and others. We talk about leadership all the time. But, the key component suggested by Gallup is *...outstanding leaders are not all alike. Each leads from his/her individual set of talents and strengths.*

When you assume a position of leadership, you do so because of who you are and because of the strengths you possess and because of what you have done- So why change? Yet many people change when they get into leadership positions. You have seen it happen many times: the athletics director who, after being promoted, totally changes his/her behavior, the new head coach who exhibits none of the positive qualities displayed as an assistant; the new boss who has a total personality transplant after being promoted to the corner office. It happens every day. In every single case the new leader does not understand leadership. They all were promoted because of who they are and what they have done... not because of what we think they will become.

That athletics director changes and behaves like he/she thinks an AD should act, maybe like their high school AD. The new coach acts like he/she thinks Alex Ferguson acts looking to mimic his strengths rather than accentuate their own. The new boss changes his/her personality to that of Jack Welch. In all three examples, these people have made a big mistake.

During the last few years I have talked to many MLS players who comment on how the head coach has

“changed” since the player had him in high school or club. Many college players agree and talk about the transformation of the recently-promoted assistant coach. And many coaches have talked about the personality change of their AD since taking office. The transformation or change is usually negative. When a leader or coach tries to be a different person and does not accentuate his/her strengths, credibility is lost in the eyes of the players or subordinates. Once credibility is lost, the job is lost.

We all know this. We all know that a coach should coach and act within his/her personality. All of us should rely on our strengths and manage our weaknesses. No one wants to put up with a fake. So remember, be yourself, and never forget that a good coach *is what he/she is!* ®

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