

Leadership ATtributes

Making Great Leaders in Athletic Training

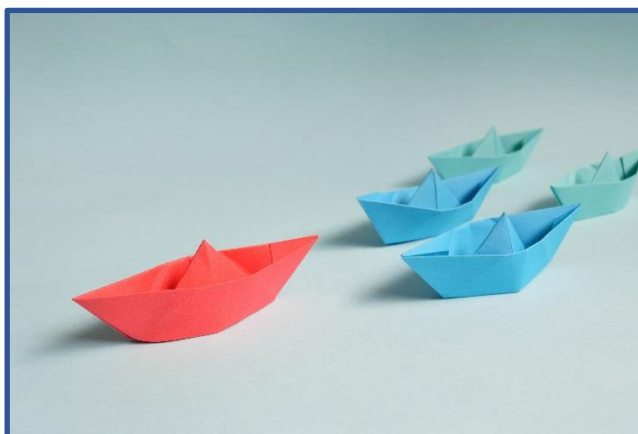
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Great Leaders

As leadership expert John C. Maxwell once stated, “a leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.” Those who’ve been in the presence of great leaders absorb their passion and feel their enthusiasm.

These attributes are contagious, and those who believe in their leader will be inspired to perform to the best of their ability. Focusing on leadership attributes, what makes a successful

leader in athletic training? This month, AT Efficiency explores this topic and how athletic trainers can utilize leadership skills to their advantage.



Leadership in Athletic Training

In a 2007 study conducted by Lautrent and Bradney¹, leadership behaviors of athletic trainers are similar to those in other professions with the prime focus on modeling and enabling behaviors. As being a hands-on profession, these habits make sense. In leadership, an enabler is one that enables another to achieve an end; empowers the development of a person,² and modeling describes the development of skills through imitation. Within our education, we were exposed to these behaviors in one form or another. We observed how our preceptors treated patients, and felt that reassurance and accomplishment when the head AT complemented us on skills that we performed.

In a February 2018 article, Forbes defined 8 essential attributes of great leadership.³ With management and the traditional business model aside, 4 of these attributes stood out, and best represent leadership in athletic training:

Sincere enthusiasm: Think back to a time when you were working through your clinical rotation, or even early in your career when you encountered a leader who was truly enthusiastic about athletic training. How did that make you feel? Were you excited to be an athletic trainer? Enthusiasm and passion are contagious, and those who recognize this are more

likely to be influenced by leaders. That's why it's so important to be enthusiastic about the work that you're doing and about the profession. Others are watching and will feed off your emotions. Change your perspective even on a bad day. Thinking positively and self-talk are important for getting you through those rough days, and increase your ability to be a great leader.

Integrity: Doing what's right even if it isn't the best thing to do. Great leaders exhibit integrity at all times: The following was written by the late sportswriter Frank Deford⁴:

"In May of 2005, Fernando Verdasco of Spain was serving to America's top player, Andy Roddick. Verdasco had lost the first set and was down 5-3, love-40. Triple match point. He hit deep on the second serve. The line judge called the ball out and Roddick had the match, only Roddick refused to accept the point. Verdasco's serve had nicked the line, he said. Stunned, the umpire let Roddick overrule him. Verdasco then fought back, held serve, won the set and then the match.

Probably you heard nothing about this display of generosity. It barely rated a mention in the American press. Yet, Roddick risked and lost tens of thousands of dollars in a tournament where he was seeded first simply because he felt obliged to be honest....Roddick, by the way, could not have been criticized if he'd simply accepted the bad call. The ethic in modern, big-time sport is that it's up to the officials to call the game and for the players merely to abide by those decisions even if they know that they have succeeded under false pretenses....

In one moment with victory his for the taking—no, not for the taking—is given, is assumed, Andy Roddick went against the way of the world and simply instinctively did what he thought was right. Once upon time we called such foolish innocents sportsmen..."

It's easy for us to admit when we're wrong. Embarrassment, feelings of ignorance, and other negative thoughts and feelings filter through our minds. Andy Roddick teaches us a great lesson about integrity. Losing a match, disrupting his standings, and the loss of prize money meant nothing when compared to his integrity. Admitting mistakes places us on a higher level of standards and develops our character. Integrity is one of, if not the greatest leadership attribute one can possess.

Great communication skills: The NATA is truly geared toward increasing communication skills for athletic trainers. Communication is a key element in athletic training, and we need to have the communication skills to relay information regarding an injury to those who are impacted the most. At times, communication is can be unclear and difficult to say the least. Coaches might not communicate a change in practice time, or a patient does not provide accurate information regarding their injury. With these and many other scenarios, avoiding frustration and communicating your viewpoint in a professional manner can not only improve your

leadership attributes, but promotes your communication skills to another level of professionalism.

Empowerment: Training and developing those in your network will provide you with more value as you build the value of others. Case in point, twentieth century mathematician, Paul Erdos wasn't your typical mathematics scholar. Displaying eccentric and manic behaviors, Erdos would show up in the middle of the night unannounced at a colleague's home looking to perform complex math problems. The book *The Man Who Loved Numbers*⁵, details Erdos and his oddball behaviors. "If he wanted to work on a theorem at 5AM he'd bang pots and pans until you came downstairs." However, with craziness aside, Erdos collaborated and empowered more people in the field of mathematics than anyone else.

People love leaders who bring out the best in them, and Erdos was no stranger to that. Mathematicians who collaborated with Erdos refer to their "Erdos number", or how many degrees removed they are from having worked with him. This number was so important that Mathematicians would put their "Erdos number" on their resume. Empowering people can have profound effects on their lives. Paul Erdos lifted others up ahead of his goals, and those he mentored were recognized and won more awards than he ever achieved.

Who's your Paul Erdos? Who's lifted you up to help you achieve your goals?

Why Leadership Matters

Leadership is about vision, setting a direction, growth, and innovation. It involves picturing how tomorrow can be better than today, and creating this vision into a reality. In athletic training, the only way we've been able to grow, change, and develop is through leadership. Whether it's the expansion into emerging practices, or the quest to achieve third party reimbursement, and most recently, the lobbying of the sports medicine clarity act, leadership has been a driving force to improve the position of athletic training. Without great leadership providing a vision, the future would be murky for the profession. However, with recent initiatives, this is not the case as leadership matters and provides a driving force to achieve goals.

References

¹ Laurent, T. G., & Brandney, D. A. (2007). Leadership Behaviors of Athletic Training Leaders Compared With Leaders in Other Fields. *The Journal of Athletic Training*, 42(1), 120–125.

² A Guide for AIESEC Enablers On Leadership Development. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/578b6eecb3db2b247148f1e8/t/5810ce12be6594a6e2addb66/1477496355364/Enablers>

³ Fries, K. (2018, February). 8 Essential Qualities That Define Great Leadership. *Forbes*.

⁴ Deford, F. (2005, May 11). In Praise of Roddick and Old-Fashioned Sportsmanship. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4647602>

⁵ Hoffman, P. (1998). *The Man Who Loved Only Numbers: The Story of Paul Erdos and the Search for Mathematical Truth*. New York, New York: Hachette Books.

About the Author



Scott Mullett is the founder and owner of AT Efficiency. Scott received both his bachelor's and master's degree from Kent State University. Scott has worked in the secondary school setting, and currently holds a position within the industrial/occupational sector. Scott's goal is to advocate the value of the athletic trainer in all settings.