



Counsel

After thanking an old friend for “giving me advice,” he, a former Marine Colonel, quickly corrected me, “I don’t give advice. Advice is from people who have never done it. I give *counsel*, Major Kapitulik. Counsel!”

I coach my son’s youth flag football, basketball and lacrosse teams. Based on these experiences, rather than receive counsel, I would like to take this opportunity to offer some to coaches, parents, and all leaders. While coaching, I keep this same counsel written on a whiteboard next to me as a reminder that I must improve in all these areas (especially #2).

First, call timeouts. Coaches call timeouts during games to make course corrections, but as I have learned, sometimes we need to call timeouts to help kids just catch their breath and recharge their battery. Yes, they are kids, but everyone’s battery needs time to recharge at some point. However, not only do most of my son’s teammates play the same sports all year, their parents have them signed up to do numerous other activities every day of the week to include throughout the summer. They are ten years old! My counsel to parents is to call timeouts. During a game, they help kids to physically, mentally and emotionally recharge. It helps them do the same



throughout the year, as well. Grind anyone down, and eventually they break; physically, mentally and emotionally. All leaders must remember this.

Second, coach *at* the bench, not *from* the bench. Yelling and screaming does NOT help our teammates perform better. In fact, it has the opposite effect. Screaming instructions to our athletes during a youth basketball game makes an already stressful situation for them, that much more stressful. For minor adjustments, “shift left or shift right,” use “Battlefield Communication:” use the players name, be concise and direct with a one or two word adjustment and do it at the appropriate volume. If major course corrections are required, do so during timeouts (see counsel point #1 above), and remember, “calm breeds calm.” Unfortunately, chaos breeds chaos too. Parents, if you would like to coach, please volunteer to do so. In most communities, youth organizations are in desperate need of parents to volunteer. If you choose **not** to do so, then leave it up to the person who did. Their title is Coach. Yours is Mom and Dad. Let the coach, coach. You, as the parent, cheerlead. And remember to cheer for *all* the children; there *are* others on the team.

Third, be positive. Sports are **not** always fun, but games should be. Coach athletes hard at practice. Encourage during games. Our ultimate success is based on how we prepare anyway, not on how we perform in any one contest. Ensuring that athletes have fun while playing a sport helps ensure that they will want to prepare for it even more. During preparation, challenge team members to work hard, to get better, and to grow. Then, ensure we create a fun, positive environment while they play the game. One final point on demanding that our young people get outside of their comfort zone, work hard, get better and grow: the first rule of leadership is to never ask the members of our team to do something that we aren’t willing to do ourselves. My counsel for coaches, parents and leaders of any team is to remember this. As leaders, if we are going to demand that the people who play or work for us get outside their comfort zone, get better, and grow, we must do so as well. When is the last time you’ve done so?

Finally, commit. If we volunteer to coach, commit to doing our very best at it. Our athletes deserve it. Show up on time, dressed appropriately and prepared for every practice and game. Don’t use the daily challenges we are faced with as excuses for not doing so. We chose to volunteer, now give our 100%. If we can’t do so, then we shouldn’t be coaching. If we make a commitment, honor it. Parents, remember to do the same. You have the luxury to only worry about your child. A coach worries about the entire team. If you sign your child up to play for that team, ensure they, like the coach, show up on time, dressed appropriately, and prepared for every practice and game. If you can’t do so, then you shouldn’t have signed them up in the first place. If you make a commitment, honor it! Sports do not teach great life lessons. Great coaches and



parents do *through* sports. Showing up on time, dressed appropriately, and prepared for every practice and game teaches our young people to honor their commitments.

By definition, honoring our commitments *is* integrity. My counsel to coaches, parents and all leaders is to teach it.

Attack!

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Founder and CEO

"Letters on Leadership" are published periodically by The Program, a leadership development and team building company that works with the nation's leading corporations as well as professional and collegiate athletic teams.

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