

ON INCLUSIVE SPIRIT TEAMS, THE BEST LEADERS:

Understand their role is to *create opportunities* for the team and to *empower* all teammates to reach their highest levels of success. They understand that true leadership is about lifting others up and helping them grow.

Collaborate with team members to create the team's "Big Win Vision" for the season. They ask teammates: What does success look like for this team this year? How can we take this team to the next level? Much of leadership involves helping teammates to understand that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Transform the team's Big Win Vision for the season into a reality. To do this, captains work to ensure everyone on the team is enrolled in co-creating the team's shared vision and all team members understand and align themselves with the team's mission.

Empower all team members to contribute to the team in a way that plays to their unique strengths. They do this by treating all teammates as equals and understanding that every team member has unique skills and valuable experiences to bring to the team.

Seek out honest, constructive, and engaged feedback from all teammates. They actively seek out feedback and then listen intently when they receive it because they are genuinely interested in teammates' opinions, ideas, and perspectives.

Embrace all challenges/problems/issues as opportunities to improve. They eagerly accept challenges because they understand it is through addressing challenges head-on that the team will grow.

Choose bravery over popularity. The best leaders care more about challenging convention, speaking up, ensuring that teammates are meeting team expectations, and putting their ideas on the line than they do about making sure everyone likes them. They have the tough conversations when they need to so the team can continue to thrive.

Value connection over perfection. The best leaders remember that it is far more important to build meaningful relationships with teammates than it is to execute a perfect practice or performance. As a result, they focus on treating every person in every situation with the utmost respect.

Leverage the success of the team to spread a message of courage, compassion, and connection throughout the school and community. They understand the power their team has to positively impact school and community culture, so they seek out opportunities to expose the school and community to their team.

5 PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEAM CAPTAINS

Team captains have 5 primary responsibilities:

1. Plan and lead practices, activities, and performances
 2. Communicate with teammates, team advisers, and parents
 3. Create and model an inclusive experience for ALL team members
 4. Set expectations for team members and follow through in a way that holds all team members to the same set of expectations
 5. Engage in transition planning for the team at the end of every school year
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1. Plan and lead practices and performances

As a team captain, you are now responsible for planning, organizing, and leading your team's practices, activities, and performances. To help with this responsibility we suggest that you:

Plan your season. Work with your adviser and school administrators to determine your practice and activity/game/performance schedules. Your Athletic Director will likely need to help you reserve practice and performance space.

When putting together your practice plan, be sure to consider the full season or semester to allow adequate time to prepare for big performances or games. Look at the big picture for the season and then pace team progress to align with the season's goals.

Create a calendar. Put together a calendar for practices and performances, including games, parades, assemblies, and community events. In addition, it is helpful to create a basic agenda before each practice, to include:

- Any important team announcements or updates
- Material you plan to cover
- Any games/activities you want to add

Remain Flexible. While it's important to arrive at practice with a plan, be sure your plan is flexible. If the skills you're teaching are too difficult or too easy, make some quick adjustments.

Strive for Consistency. Practices and performances tend to go more smoothly when team members have at least a general idea of what to expect. Strive to keep your practice days and times consistent throughout the season. Similarly, follow the same format for each practice.

Lead Practice, Uninterrupted. If a teammate is struggling, trust his/her partner to handle the situation so that practice continues seamlessly in spite of the issue. Your teammates can handle

issues that come up because you've empowered them to do so! As captain, your responsibility is to lead the practice for the benefit of the entire team, not to address every individual challenge that presents itself at practice.

Ask Questions. Always remain open to asking questions. Being team captain does not mean that you need to know it all. To the contrary, the very best leaders rely on their teammates, advisers, and parents to help them find creative solutions to challenges.

Anticipate Game Day Distractions. Before each game or event, make time for your team to adjust to the crowd and location before the performance is set to begin. By arriving early, your team will have time to acclimate to a different environment and the challenges that it may bring.

2. Communicate with teammates, advisers, and parents

As a team captain, you are now responsible for communicating with all parties affiliated with your team (teammates, advisers, parents, and school administrators). You will work closely with your adviser in this role.

Understand that this role may require more email activity than you're used to. Try to check your email two times every day. If someone asks you a question that you do not have an answer to, make sure you still acknowledge receipt of the email (say something like "I received your email today. Thanks for reaching out. I need to check with XXX to confirm the answer to your question, but you should expect to hear back from me by XXX.") Make sure your adviser is copied on every email and included in every group message.

Additional tips for effective communication:

- Put together an email and phone number list for all teammates and parents.
- Communicate your team's practice and performance schedule to teammates and parents, in writing (preferably, via email).
- Communicate promptly any schedule changes to teammates and parents. Generally speaking, texting rather than emailing works best for communicating last-minute changes.
- Communicate any questions, concerns or issues experienced by the team to your team leadership (co-captain(s) and adviser(s)).

3. Create an inclusive environment for all team members:

As a team captain, you are responsible for creating an inclusive environment. This means you must model the inclusive behavior you want to see from *all* team members. Oftentimes, freshmen and other students new to the team are nervous and unsure at the first few practices. You can help to create a welcoming environment by greeting all team members as they arrive. As the

team leader, you should also encourage all team members to speak up during team meetings and planning sessions and then provide positive feedback to validate their contributions.

Because you will be standing in front of your team while leading practices, you will have a great visual of your team members. If one of your teammates is being overlooked or not being included, prompt another team member to step in.

If team members aren't interacting or seem checked out during practice, make a group announcement to the team members to do the next activity with their partner or neighbor. Sometimes, these conversations will be gentle group reminders ("Let's face our neighbor and practice the cheer in groups of two.") and other times this might require a private conversation ("Ashley, I saw that your partner spent some of practice alone today. Do you have any ideas about how we can ensure that he/she is more engaged with the rest of the team?")

4. Set and Follow Through On Team Expectations

Part of creating an inclusive environment for your team involves setting team expectations and then making sure that all team members are held to the same expectations.

You may have inherited a team that has clearly defined expectations for attendance, behavior at practice/performance, and overall contributions from team members. On the other hand, your team may have struggled in the past to define and follow through on expectations.

No matter your situation, you must define the expectations for all team members. Clear expectations keep teammates focused, reduce frustrations, and allow for constructive feedback. Setting expectations ensures that all team members are on the same page and allows everyone to be successful together.

The expectations for your team should reflect your team's values, attitudes, and beliefs. You may want to address how teammates should participate, communicate, cooperate, and deal with conflict.

You may decide to set team expectations within your leadership team (captains and advisers). You may instead decide to seek input from all team members in setting team expectations. However you decide to create team expectations, *the expectations should be communicated clearly and in writing to all team members.*

Once you have clearly communicated team expectations, you need to create a plan with your advisers that addresses what you will do (what are the consequences?) when a team member fails to meet expectations. *You should also clearly communicate these consequences (again, preferably in writing) with your teammates.*

Example: The expectation on our team is that every team member will be present for every practice unless the team member is excused from the practice in advance by a team captain. (List circumstances where a team member will be excused from practice.) After X number of unexcused absences, the team member will be asked [list a consequence, such as sitting out for the next performance]. After X number of unexcused absences, the team member will be asked to leave the team.

A few tips on enforcing team expectations:

Praise publicly; criticize privately. It's fun to give a teammate a shout-out in front of the entire group. When it comes time to address a teammate on poor behavior, however, make time to speak with your teammate privately. No one likes to be called out in front of a group.

NEVER send a group text or email regarding behavior. Group emails and texts are best used for relaying logistical information (game time, meeting location etc.), not for raising more sensitive issues. Team behavior issues should always be dealt with in person (either collectively if the issue involves several team members, or individually if the issue involves one or two team members).

NEVER discuss team issues outside of the leadership circle or outside of the team. You don't want a team member to hear from a student at the school that you were discussing her behavior with your friends. If you feel frustrated or you are struggling to come up with a solution to a challenge being presented on the team, talk to your other captain and your advisers for help.

5. Engage in Transition Planning

Each spring, as you're preparing either for graduation (seniors) or the exciting year ahead, remember that your team is still counting on you. In fact, what you choose to do over the next few months has the potential to make or break your team. Your team needs your help in transitioning at the end of the school year. Often, this will involve a change in leadership from one captain to another. It almost always involves a change in roster, as some students graduate and others join the team. An effective change in leadership and roster is critical to your team's survival. Transition tests your team's ability to effectively work through changes so it can continue to thrive and grow.

Responsibilities of outgoing captains:

Organize team information. Create a team binder or notebook or add to the one your team already has. Add information for important contacts (school administrators, team advisers, parents, local businesses that have supported your team, etc.). Jot down all of the cheers and dances your team learned in the last year, and a list of all the games and events where your team performed. Want to go the extra mile? Include a few checklists that provide step-by-step instructions for the new captain to follow in order to ensure successful practices and game day

performances. Note: While binders and checklists are great, the best thing you can do is sit down with the new team captain in a relaxed setting and give him/her the benefit of your experience.

Share responsibilities. Begin to increase the responsibilities of your incoming captain months before he/she will actually take over. Still having practices? Start letting your incoming captain take the lead. If your team is already done for the year and starting to plan for tryouts or recruitment of new members, make sure your incoming captain is involved in the process.

Pass the baton. Officially pass the baton to your new captain before you graduate. Communicate to all team members and other stakeholders (*i.e.*, admins, advisers, parents) that you have officially transitioned. Be sure to provide them with the new captain's contact information.

Responsibilities of new captains:

Select your 2nd-in-charge captain. This person should be at least one year below you in school so that he/she will be positioned to take over when you graduate. It's usually helpful to discuss your captain options with your team adviser and determine together how you will make the selection.

Determine your fall practice and performance schedule. Meet with your adviser and Athletic Director to map out your practice and performance plan. Remember, you don't need to limit yourself to football games and basketball games. Other fall and winter sports, assemblies, and pep rallies provide great opportunities for team performances. Think beyond athletic events as well. Does the debate team need some support? How about the drama club? Remember, everyone can benefit from school spirit.

Assess your roster and recruit new team members as needed/desired. Work with your team adviser to develop a recruitment plan. This should include a district-wide email and may involve posting flyers around the school or asking team parents for referrals. Before adding a student to your team, make sure he/she can commit to participating in all practices and performances.

Assess apparel/fundraising needs. Is your team expanding this year? Does your team apparel still fit properly? Assess your apparel needs, and make a plan if you need to order apparel or even do some fundraising over the summer.

Plan a few summer get-togethers. Your team doesn't need to wait until school resumes to get together. Many teams stay in touch throughout the summer by planning a few casual gatherings. These gatherings don't need to be formal practices. Pool parties, picnics, movie nights, and spirit-sign-making parties are also great ways to introduce new teammates and get excited for the upcoming season.