

Leadership Training to Retain USA Swimming Officials (Leadership Clinic Material)

There are some leadership principles that apply to all leadership positions, and they can be manipulated to specific roles of USA Swimming officials. These basic principles of leadership must be followed to be successful in a leadership role in the LSC.

1. Start with a strong set of beliefs. What does your ideal officiating program look like? How should officials in your LSC behave and perform?
2. Develop a strong sense of ethics. Succeed with the rules and have a clear understanding about right and wrong on any issue. Everyone at a meet has a personal agenda. Everyone, that is, but the officiating crew. Coaches are there to be passionate advocates for their swimmers. Officials are there to be calm, dispassionate observers of fairness.
3. Make meticulous preparation for the task you take on. Failing to plan is planning to fail.
4. Care about the people you serve. Loving people and caring about them is a requirement for leadership. Develop a sense of "team" in your officiating program. D'Artagnan had it right—"one for all and all for one."
5. Have courage. Courage is something you have, but you may not realize you have it. You may be afraid... but you can learn to manage fear and overcome it. Keep cool under pressure.
6. See and communicate to your peers, the big picture, provide context and perspective. Clearly explain the mission, standards and priorities.
7. Make tough, sound decisions, make them on time and explain the reasons for the decision. Interpersonal skills are critical. That is the hardest skill to teach. Technical skills are easy to impart to others.
8. Be an optimist. Be a problem solver... being positive will help people to buy into the solution you outline. When things seem out of control, be calm... at least appear to be calm, even if you are not.

In the LSC officials' community, no one leads all of the time at all meets. Leadership roles change from meet to meet. Volunteers are cycled through many positions on a continual basis. The very definition of teamwork involves people moving in and out of leadership roles and cultivating a community of volunteer officials who know the desired outcome, and pitch in to achieve that outcome, regardless of the role assigned them on any given occasion. This culture of working as a cohesive official's team should become the norm in every LSC.

How do we as leaders in our LSC make this happen?

1. Define the various positions on the deck and recruit enough officials to each meet to ensure that no official is required to fill more positions than can be handled properly and correctly. (These positions are defined and all responsibilities are in the Officiating Handbook on the USA Swimming Web site.) Guide the officials to this site.

2. Make sure all officials understand and are willing to do what is expected of them so they can fulfill their required functions with efficiency and professionalism.
3. Outline the steps and suggested timeline your LSC has instituted to move smoothly up the steps of the Leadership pyramid. Clearly defined advancement steps are an essential retention tool.

Outline of the Leadership presence that is necessary to instill confidence in officials on the meet deck.

1. Visual Presence

Your appearance has a definite effect on the way you are perceived. The first impression swimmers, coaches, spectators, and other officials get must be that of a competent official in a clean, well-fitting uniform.

2. Legal Presence

Assigned leadership positions begin well before meet day. Pre-meet consultation and planning is essential to the smooth running meet

You exercise authority not by edict, but by arriving early and checking the pool area, the equipment and by briefing your fellow officials on their specific roles on the team.

You gain respect from your peers on your leadership role by applying the rules and regulations of the competition as they are meant to be applied—with regard for both the letter and the spirit of the rules. A totalitarian approach doesn't cut it; neither does an anarchist approach. You inspire confidence in the swimmers, coaches, spectators, and other officials by correct understanding and application of those rules as you meet all expectations of excellence.

3. Psychological Presence

Everyone on the deck can tell if you're "there" or not. If you have a feeling of centeredness about your role, all will sense the rightness of your leadership assignment.

When you exhibit signs of not being comfortable with your role, no matter what your assignment—of not being in the right place or of not making the right decision—everyone on deck will reflect that sense of uneasiness back to you. Therefore you must actively study diligently and muster the inner confidence to do the job well.

4. Emotional Presence.

Emotional presence can be your salvation. Lack of it will be your downfall.

Emotions can be infectious. Smiles breed smiles. Sharp words breed sharp words. Calm words evoke calm.

When you feel positive, you project that feeling to others through your words and actions. The strength of your emotional presence is a solid foundation for everyone. This is how you have assurance of control in the midst of the frenzied activity of a meet.

5. Physical presence.

Both moving and standing, the physicality of your officiating are of importance. How you move around the pool is noticed by all. Your positioning and movement as a stroke or turn official is equally important as that of assigned officials. Be attentive and in the correct position to make the correct call. There is more to the referee's question of "where were you?" than just being stationed in the correct jurisdiction.

How well and how unobtrusively you move to place yourself in the right place at the right time is critical to creating a positive physical presence.

Officials do not call attention to themselves, but they are not meant to be invisible at the competition. Their presence reassures the competitors, coaches and spectators that the competition will be fun, fair, and safe.

6. Tactical Presence

If you understand the leadership role at a meet, and you have that assignment, you can anticipate rather than react. You can intercept problems and take them off the deck to solve them out of the vision and ears of the participants.

Is the meet outcome going to depend on the order of finish in the final relay? If so, that is not the time to be doing paperwork back in the office.

Keep an "ear "on the calls being made. Do they match your expectations for a meet of this level? If not, have you thought about how to handle the problem proactively? When listening to the calls being made, are you hearing an excessive number of certain calls? Why? Is coincidence making calls go "against" one team more than another? Is it really coincidence? Is there a team needing help with starting procedures? Do you have an overzealous official who doesn't understand the rules correctly? Good discussions.

7. Strategic Presence

Once you understand the ebb and flow of the meet, you can adapt and adjust your controls to develop your strategy.

Every minute of prior planning will pay back large dividends.

An officials community can be created that will properly prepare officials who don't normally consider themselves leaders, the ability to assume the leadership role whenever their skills are needed. Total training in all skills is essential to reaching the potential of our officials. If a person has not been trained to fill the follower role, or lower steps on the leadership ladder, the odds are significantly decreased that he or she will ever reach his or her full leadership potential. W. Edwards Deming is generally given credit as the developer of Total Quality Management. His 14 Points of Management and the need to emphasize following wisely as well as leading wisely, can be adapted for the swimming officials' community.

1. **CREATE CONSTANCY OF PURPOSE TOWARD IMPROVEMENT.** Lack of constancy of purpose is the first of Deming's Seven Deadly Diseases. All our officials from the N3 referees to the local stroke and turn officials need to understand their function in the larger swimming community.
2. **ADOPT THE NEW PHILOPOPHY.** The current status quo is unacceptable. Every organizational system is perfectly designed to give the results it is now getting. For new and better results, a new design is needed. If your LSC has difficulty attracting and retaining officials, a new program is needed.
3. **AVOID MASS INSPECTION.** Inspection is closing the barn door after the horse has gotten loose. In USA Swimming training is the key. Deliver quality and consistent training. Standardize the clinics and mentoring standards. Frequent contact, e.g., use of email messages to all officials from one source, helps with consistency.
4. **BUY FOR QUALITY, NOT JUST FOR PRICE.** Develop a relationship built upon trust. Involve all your officials in the operation of your officiating community. Mixing management lectures at little bit here, consider the lessons from Quality Circle Management and other ways to involve and listen to everyone and let them be involved.
5. **CONTINUALLY IMPROVE PROCESSES, AND SERVICES.** Point 1 (consistency of purpose) is talking the talk. Now we've got to walk the walk. This means we have to have a plan for improvement. What needs to be improved? What could work better? Use your Quality Circle management leaders to identify these areas.
6. **INSTITUTE ON-THE-JOB TRAINING.** Of course, this is the cornerstone of our officials' training. However, when was the last time you really looked at your local training process? Are your new officials getting the most they can from your training?
7. **INSTITUTE LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT THAT FOCUSES ON FACILITATION NOT DICTATION.**
Because our manager, leader, and follower roles change so frequently for all officials, it is crucial to develop active followers who know their job and do not take on others roles that they are not assigned to do.

8. DRIVE OUT FEAR. Everyone should be able to try to contribute toward the officials committee goals. Your status as an official, should never under, or over, emphasize your potential to contribute.
9. BREAK DOWN BARRIERS BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS. The staff areas in most non-profit organizations are highly inter-dependent. Referees, starters, stroke officials, and dry deck officials must all work together to achieve the desired results.
10. ELIMINATE SLOGANS, EXHORTATIONS, AND NUMERICAL GOALS. Setting a numerical goal—a line on a chart—is equally useless without a comprehensive plan from leadership on how to achieve the stated goal.
11. ELIMINATE MANAGEMENT BY NUMBERS AND BY OBJECTIVE. Both are detrimental to organizational morale and fail to take the system into account. These philosophies assume that workers are 100% responsible for the quality of the product and services. This is very seldom the case.
12. ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO PRIDE OF WORKMANSHIP. The officiating crew at a meet is a team. Our outcome is a team outcome. We continually help and teach one another as team members. Artificial barriers between assigned and “un-assigned” team members are divisive.
13. INSTITUTE A PROGRAM OF PERSONAL EDUCATION AND SELF-IMPROVEMENT. Create incentives and opportunities for workers to improve. Budget for officials training and travel to larger meets. Is the referee more “important” than the other members of the crew?
14. PUT EVERYONE TO WORK TO ACCOMPLISH THE TRANSFORMATION. Although the officials chair must take the initiative to improve, it takes teamwork to get the job done.

Be proactive by thinking of possible solutions to problems before they happen. Always ask yourself two questions about your possible solutions. What could happen if I apply the solution I am predisposed to use... both good and bad. Can I generate a more positive outcome with some proactive thought before the incident occurs?

This may be a good time to pose the enclosed questions to the participants and ask for their possible solutions. Make sure all possible answers are within the rules of USA Swimming.

Leadership qualities are developed with or without authority. Leaders get others to work with them to accomplish the goal. The leader who relies on authority to get others to meet the stated goals, will never be a true leader, they will not awaken the passion to work together that a true leader brings out in everyone. Watch your friends and co-workers, recognize and show regard for leadership qualities in others. These officials will become your greatest asset if you will encourage their participation.

Leadership Techniques Handout

Do not lead by edict. Ask questions of the official or coach that will lead him or her to the correct conclusion. (example) If I accept this swimmer's excuse for missing his last event and allow him to swim his next race, who might be affected positively or negatively? Is it within the rules to allow it?

There is no motivation derived from a pay-check for the majority of USA Swimming officials so nurturing and kindness is the best way to retain & lead volunteers. Impatience and autocratic authority will surely drive volunteers away.

Praise in public...re-educate in private

If you really want to lead you must get in the midst of the volunteers and serve with them.

Use the sandwich technique to re-educate Praise---Problem solve---Praise

The best leaders always: Delegate... Support... Coach... Direct... Acknowledge others accomplishments.

When I slow down...I go faster!

If it is to be...It is up to we... Lets dig in team!