

Building Success as a Young Coach

By Joe Parks and Chris Quick

Define Success

Quick - I define success by winning as a consequence of teaching the right values. We coach good people first and good runners second. A successful season is one in which we taught the right messages, had fun, and won as a result. By creating high expectations for personal conduct, commitment, hard work, and loyalty, we have been able to establish a pattern of success in competition.

Parks - To me a successful program is getting kids to buy in to the program and to believe in the struggle. I see success in molding kids to be committed, loyal, and willing to sacrifice for the betterment of the team. If kids get on board with what the team is trying to accomplish they are likely to be successful. I expect to be successful and a part of being successful is winning.

Mentors for Learning Success

Find any coach you admire that has been consistently successful and find out what they are doing. It is likely you will learn something and be able to use it in your program.

Joe Newton	PASSION	"You've gotta love it."
Steve Currins	EXPECTATIONS	"Expectations are the key."
Jeff Quick	SPORTSMANSHIP	"Run with your feet and not with your mouth."
Al Carius, Jim Macnider	FUN	"Run for fun and personal bests."
Joe Johnson, Fred Miller	COMPETITIVE WILL	"At the end of a race it's all about guts and desire."
Bill Cornell	CONFIDENCE	"How do you accomplish your goals? You must first believe that you can do it."
Dan Iverson	TEAM CULTURE	"Cross country is a counter-cultural activity."
Paul Vandersteen	ENTHUSIASM	"Nothing great ever happens without enthusiasm."

Books

Joe Newton, Coaching Cross Country Successfully, Running to the Top of the Mountain

Jack Daniels, Daniels Running Formula, 2nd ed.

Chris Lear, Running with the Buffaloes

John L. Parker, Once a Runner

Kenny Moore, Bowerman and the Men of Oregon

Chris Lear, Sub 4:00: Alan Webb and the Quest for the Fastest Mile

Models of Success - Where do you look for how it is done right?

Program models

Quick - Programs I have studied and emulated at times include York high school, Schaumburg high school, Moline high school, and Naperville North high school as well as maintaining the traditions from the Palatine boys and girls programs.

Parks - I don't so much model any specific program, but do have similarities in all the above. I have studied successful programs (college and HS) and took bits and pieces of their training and team philosophies. Much of what I've learned and believe in is based off of what other successful programs are doing.

Weak Model of Success	Powerful Model of Success
Lone wolf coach	Sharing coach, seeks mentors and strong assistants
Coach owns the team	Team owns the team
Attitude of cockiness, brashness	Attitude of quiet confidence
Inflexibility of approach	Flexibility of approach
Coaches only the good runners	Coaches all runners
Waits for talent	Develops talent
Focuses only on running	Masters all the details
One season coach	Coaches both cross country, track
In-season vision	Year-round vision
Single season visions for athletes	Career visions for athletes
Negative reinforcement	Sees a positive aspect in every athlete
Contains work within the season	Works on the program every day, year-round
Succeeds when the athletes push to success	Creates a team culture of success
Sticks to the same schedule every year	Seeks out new information and experiments
Expects athletes to be self-motivated	Motivates his athletes
Accepts little input from the athletes	Effective communicator and listener
Poor role model	Leads by example
Lacks enthusiasm in the everyday routine	Displays genuine excitement about the team
Athletes have too much say	Tough, but fair
Needs short-term results	Patient with team and individual athletes

Details for Success - What little things lead to big success?

Goal-setting meetings - How good does the team want to be? Meet with them before each season and have them tell you what they want to accomplish. Coach the team to whatever level it asks. Also, meet with each kid after each season to discuss the season and goals for the future.

Body maintenance - Stretching after runs, ice baths, foam rollers, stretching ropes, sticks

Form running - Coach posture and technique - drills, 10 x 100 or 4 x 200 or 3 x 300 or 5 x 150 every day

Core strength - Push-ups, sit-ups, planks each day, full 20 minute core routine three times a week

Motivation - Letters to the team on big meet days, cross country bulletin board, team meetings (infrequent, but high impact and inspirational - use them judiciously)

Marketing - Web site, tons of team gear, Palatine Invite, message board, tons of pictures

Mileage - Chart and own the workloads, personalized mileage charts for summer and winter running, web site miles

Race tactics - We work on something in every single race, develop race tactics for state meet

Fun - Manderson Invite, Polar Bear Shuffle, Ultimate Frisbee, bocce ball, Devil's Lake, Camp Sand, team dinners, post-season banquet, Relay for Life, Quarter Challenge, ice cream social, Polar Bear Christmas party (white elephant), The Weekly Planet

Pack - No one works out alone - teach kids to run with their teammates

Pacing - Teach athlete monitoring of pace - half-mile, mile markers, using a running watch

Reading - Post-season books, motivational books

Finishing - Fast running last half of each run

Course - Personalize and own your home course - the Twilight Zone, writing on course, the Larson turn, Barrington Rock, rake parties, team, coach, and maintenance men ownership of our grounds

Alumni involvement - Continued running with the team in Park District program, introduction of "All-Time Great," maintenance of team history

Community running - Workers at Twin Lakes triathlon, volunteer at Exterra series, work at Running Unlimited, No Frills, Early Bird Summer running

Final Note:

Both of us believe that the most important ingredient to a successful program is the die-hard, year-round commitment of the coach. You will get out of a program what you put into it. It is hard to beat a man or woman who wakes up each day with the intent of improving his or her program. If you want to be successful, you have to want it bad. Of course, for any good coach, you will be so passionate about running and the sport that these thoughts will be a joy rather than a burden. Your passion and commitment determine the level of success.

In our experience, success is only limited by two things: 1) inability to seek right methods of running a program and 2) unwillingness to work hard each day to implement these methods.