



DRILL TEAM LEADERSHIP

Leadership, Respect & The Inner Circle

Surprisingly, one of the biggest weakness mentioned by team leaders is getting commitment from members. We will focus some time here on building a team, developing commitment and the impact leadership and respect have on a team's commitment. How do we as leaders and as team members inspire commitment? Everyone has a responsibility, and everyone must take ownership of building a committed team. Look at this list of behaviors:

- **Lack of Trust**
- **Lack of Accountability**
- **Lack of Loyalty**
- **Lack of Self Discipline**
- **Lack of Commitment**
- **Drama**
- **Selfishness**

Raise your hand if you have experienced at least one of these destructive behaviors on a team you've been a part of. By intentionally and purposefully working to create a culture that addresses and eliminates these destructive behaviors you will take huge steps toward creating a great team and an environment people will want to commit to.

There is only one guarantee in any season, it will not be perfect. Problems will occur, some are in your control and some are not. The question is can captains and riders come together and overcome these issues when they occur. The more intentionally the culture has been formed, the better chance to handle problems.

Great teams are comprised of riders and coaches that have learned how to communicate, work and prepare. Great works habits show an investment in yourself and demonstrate respect for your teammates. Success is always a direct by-product of the work habits of your team. At some point, hard work become the standard and expectation of the team.

Tuckman's Stages of Team Formation listed in our Planning & Set-up Section explains the stages each team goes through and not just one way. Teams will go back and forth particularly at the beginning of each new season when new riders are added. Understand the stages and you will have insight into what to expect. If you can make it to stage 4 you will keep more members of your inner circle together to perpetuate the culture.

RESPECT

When I was 12 years old I was put in charge very suddenly of a team of about 20 riders, many of them older than me. It was an intermediate level team and I was expected to teach them how to ride, how to drill to voice commands, and to uphold the organizations motto of "Leadership through Guidance". This was a daunting task for a shy 12-year-old, but my father gave me some advice, he said **be honest and show them respect** as individuals and as a team. **Honesty and respect are the foundation of commitment** and if you have commitment you will have a successful team.

He said that I would make mistakes; I did, everyone does, but admit it when you do, apologize, and then move forward. **No excuses**, because you're probably the only one that believes them. I came to learn that this applied not only to drill but also to other sports teams I was a part of in the future, when I entered the work force where I found it sometimes to be a rare character trait, and to every facet of my life! It was a life lesson I learned early through drill, courtesy of my father to whom I am forever grateful.

We start with Respect. What does respect look like?

Respect your teammates – put the team first, be prepared, be reliable, be dedicated, be loyal, committed to improve, and humble – by taking constructive correction.

- Respect is acting responsibly in public and in the community.
- Being a positive role model for younger kids to observe.
- Displaying outstanding sportsmanship in victory and defeat.
- Shaking hands with your opponent after a competition.
- Being respectful – using these words often – please, thank you, and you're welcome.
- Not responding negatively to judges, coaches, or team members – verbally or body language.
- Ride and stand tall, walk with confidence.
- Take pride in keeping facilities, barns, stalls, horses, etc. neat and clean.
- When captains or judges correct you, they are saying that they see something in you that indicates you can be better, that is respect, and what a compliment it is, respect them back.

When you are upset after a competition, give yourself 24 hours before making any comments to each other or posting on social media. In almost every case your emotional perspective change, and what seemed important may now not be as necessary or critical as you thought it was. Even after 24 hours, filter your posts – do these words serve your team or just your own interests?

Win or lose, honor our sport, and your opposition, the drill community is bigger than you.

Creating the Inner Circle

How do we make sure the experience of being on a team is a good one and how do we develop what we call that inner circle that bonds great teams together? Read the story of ***Hold the Rope***. Great teams have overcome the petty individualistic tendency that plague the not so great teams. They commit to having each other's backs.

HOLD THE ROPE

Hold the Rope is an inspirational locker room story that has been told countless times by a variety of coaches. If you are unfamiliar with it, the story goes something like this:

Championship teams these teams have one thing in common: **No matter how tough it became throughout their season, they did one thing — they held the rope!**

What is “**holding the rope?**” Imagine that you are hanging from the edge of a cliff with a drop of a thousand feet. The only thing between you and a fall to your death is a rope, with the person of your choice on the other end. Who do you trust to pull you to safety?

Who will hold the rope?

Who do you know that is going to have the guts to let that rope burn their hand and not let go? How many people that you know are going to withstand the burning pain and watch the blood drip from their hands for you?

The next time your team is together, look around and ask yourself, “Who could I trust to hold the rope? Who is going to let their hands bleed for me?”

When you can look at every member on your team and say to yourself that they all would all **hold the rope for one another**, you are positioned to become a great team. You see, the team that **holds the rope** when the going gets tough are winners. Every year there are winners and losers in all sports. You don’t have to have the most talent in the arena to win the competition.

If you ride with focus & poise and do what your captains ask of you, and most of all — **hold the rope** — you will be successful. No matter what sport, to win, you must have a commitment to your team.

Once you start letting up at practice, are not prepared for practice, or start missing practices, you’ve killed the team because you didn’t hold the rope!

Don’t let your team down! You’ve got to hold the rope!

Go down to the local hardware store, and buy a long rope, cut about a 5-inch piece off that rope and give one to each team member and captains. Encouraged them to carry it with them all season as a reminder to hold the rope. It is just not during practices and competitions that we sometimes need reminders. What has to be accomplished outside of practice to make sure you are 100% focused and prepared once you arrive. Is your horse in shape and tack in good repair? Did you get your sleep and get tasks done that would nag at your conscious?

Team Building

Not everyone, okay, hardly anyone including myself, is a fan of some of the rah-rah team building exercises or the cum-by-ah sessions that are forced on some people in work environments. Teambuilding works better by having the group get to know more about each

other as individuals, what makes them tick, what are their likes and dislikes and how do they react in different situations.

The point is: **who trusts someone they don't know?** Would you hold the rope for a stranger? Help them get to know one another with a structured question and answer session. This can occur as a group, you can set it up one on one, you can have it happen before practice, after practice, away from practice or even when you are cooling your horses down during practice two people can be assigned to walk together and talk through the questions. You can rotate who walks together each session. There are so many ways you can work this, you can supply a list of questions or you can ask the team to come up with a list of questions. Make it clear that a person can take a pass on a question if they are uncomfortable with it. Also give them time before responding to a question so they can process the question before giving an answer. People, especially type A people, are afraid of dead air. But think about it, if a person is truly listening intently to what you are saying they will need time to process and respond. Often, we are too caught up in thinking about our response to really focus on everything that is being said. This requires practice. Encourage dialogue about the answer and ask each other follow-up questions and practice communicating while getting to know each other. This should be fun but also honest and heartfelt. Remember, as the leader, you should to be engaged, too. Share your answers and the rest of the team will be more comfortable sharing theirs!

TEAM BUILDING QUESTIONS:

- ❖ What is something about you or important to you that no one on the team knows?
- ❖ What things make you cringe?
- ❖ What do you like to do to unwind, your relaxing guilty pleasure?
- ❖ What is your default response to conflict?
- ❖ Most people are leaders or followers depending on the situation. When do you want to lead and when do you prefer to follow?
- ❖ How do you deal with stress?
- ❖ What is something you are really good at?
- ❖ What is your favorite drill maneuver?
- ❖ What are you insecure about during a drill?
- ❖ What is it that you enjoy about being on a team?

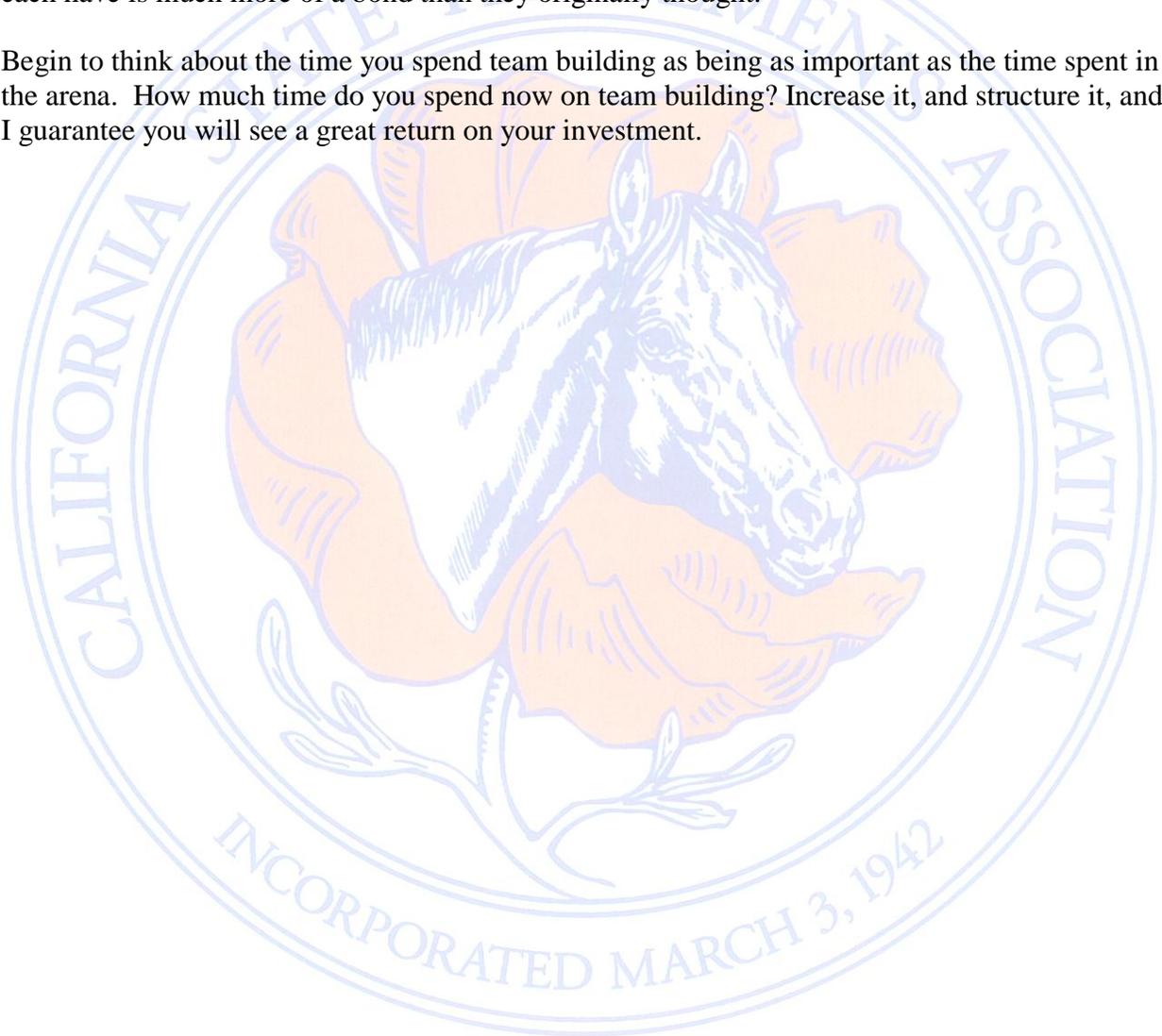
Get the idea of how it works? If you want to have a pizza party or whatever while you do it, great! Go for it—as long as you don't believe it's the food doing the teambuilding, it's the communication. Keep the structure and get to know and trust one another.

On a junior team I once led, right after try outs, one of the first things we did was to have a team overnight. We didn't call it team building, we just told the kids we wanted them to bond and get to know one another. The very first one we had we had an overnight after our first practice in the arena. They had a bonfire in the evening and played games and ate and talked just about all night, getting to know each other. They had all brought blankets and sleeping bags and were to sleep under the stars in the arena then have another practice in the morning. They all laid out their bags in a big circle, nicely spaced, heads inward around a circle. It was a particularly chilly night for Southern California and when we came out in the morning there was one huge pile of kids in the middle of the circle with all the blankets piled on top sharing the warmth. On top of the blankets was a layer of frost. They knew they could have come inside if needed, but they

decided to weather it out together, they bonded, well okay maybe they were frozen together, but they learned so much about each other in that one night that we knew we were on to something and it evolved from there. Traveling and sharing the pressures of competition is also a really important part of teams bonding together. Consider a team bonding weekend either with your horses or without. Rent a cabin in the mountains or a beach house and get to know each other.

Sometimes people will find they do not like each other, they have different opinions, goals, politics, etc. They must understand that is okay. They do not have to like each other to commit to each other for the sake of the team. They can limit their communication to team time and team issues. Over time they may just find out that the passion of horses, drill and team that they each have is much more of a bond than they originally thought.

Begin to think about the time you spend team building as being as important as the time spent in the arena. How much time do you spend now on team building? Increase it, and structure it, and I guarantee you will see a great return on your investment.



“JUST RIDE”

Welcome to **R.I.D.E.** An acronym system designed to help you build a team around guiding principles that you will define.

R.I.D.E. = COMMITMENT

R- Respect, respect for self, team, & our sport

I – Integrity, personal choice to be honest, loyal, truthful, morally upright

D- Dedication, discipline, upholding standards, submission to the team

E- Excellence, developing a champion attitude, reaching to the highest standards

R.I.D.E. is a commitment pledge for a team. R.I.D.E. distinguishes strong principles – they are more than a promise. “This is what we believe, so therefore, this is what we will do, and this is what you will see.” They are formed out of honesty, love, and respect. They are a pact that will bind and shape your team. On these principles you will not compromise.

You may choose to use R.I.D.E or you may wish to make up your own acronym. If someone is mouthing off and causing drama or someone is slipping up, you can simply put a hand on their shoulder and say **just “Ride”** and they will understand that you have recognized they are in danger of violating the pledge.

Your acronym should answer the questions; What does our team stand for? What does our leadership stand for? What does it mean to be a rider on our team? How clear is the vision to you as the leader? How clear is your vision to your team? What is your identity? Your team pledge is the glue that will hold you together, they are your compass to take you through all the ups and downs of a season. Great programs pass on the legacy of a strong pledge – even though the riders may change from year to year, the teams all look the same. Can you think of teams like that?

So, the first question becomes, what are your principles? What would you like your team to stand for? What do you want for your team culture? What would you like to be able to guarantee about your team? What are your “for sures”? If you come watch our team, I can guarantee this is what you will see.... What are your shared values?

It is **easy to be average** – it is **easy to attain mediocrity**. Your pledge cannot be average, it require something special that sets you apart from other teams. Even if you all use R.I.D.E. you will differentiate it from other teams by how you define and envision each letter and your success at implementation. The roadmap to implement looks like this:

1. Establish your pledge
2. Articulate & define your pledge
3. Provide a vision of your pledge
4. Teach your pledge
5. Get your pledge in Writing (signed by all members)
6. 7. Practice your pledge principles
8. Compare your pledge with your actions

9. Institutionalize your pledge – Find ways to weave them into everything you do.

Riders understanding and believing in your system of principles, your R.I.D.E. will create the commitment or inner circle your team needs. Your inner circle is the heart of the team. For teammates to be trusted you need to know who is going to make the right decisions in the presence of the team and when they are away from the team. I bet you know of riders that acted fine in practice then as soon as they were away from it began complaining? They lack commitment and respect.

Who will Hold the Rope! The only requirement for entry into the inner circle should be “I know what our pledge is, and I voluntarily commit myself to it. The inner circle is not determined by talent, but by choices of character.

R.I.D.E. Leadership

Being a stronger leader, will not ensure a winning competition, but strong leadership will guarantee great memories and friendships and give you a better chance for those coveted victories. There are many types of leaders on a team, one captain, but many leaders and all leaders fall into one of two categories, they are either *confidence builders* or *confidence cutters*.

Leaders should strive to accomplish these four things:

1. They should empower individuals with personal touches of appreciation, consistency, and fairness that is not based on treating everyone the same, but respecting each team member as an individual.
2. They lead change and challenge existing assumptions about how drill should be done. Let's innovate and improve our sport.
3. Leaders should create an optimistic culture and confidence about the future, both of which are linked to successful leadership and improved team performance.
4. And finally leaders should build commitment to change by breaking down goals into manageable steps. This makes it easier to achieve, easier to see progress and easier to spot successes as they happen.

Some teams **ooze can-do attitude**, while others are cynical and lethargic. What makes the difference? **Optimism and confidence** (not cockiness) are the secret ingredients to commitment to excellence. Spread the message in a totally inspiring way – internally as well as externally.

Studies show that optimism is a fairly even mixture of genetic pre-disposition and learned behavior. And if you can learn it, you can learn it at any age. Oozing that Can-Do attitude is also an important contributing factor in our Showmanship scores. It's that factor that you cannot quite put your finger on during their drill, but when their drill is over you feel good! So get to work on oozing “Can-Do”. It is also an attitude that cannot be easily faked, it comes from within, and is genuine in nature.

What is not helpful is to ruminate about negative events, or let cynicism be the main tone for interpreting events in or around your team. It is important to emphasize and celebrate positive results, as well as acknowledging and dealing with poor results.

Moods are contagious, optimism and pessimism can spread. Most helpful in creating an optimistic culture is to challenge the nay-sayers who spread cynicism. Quite often this is more a matter of habit than maliciousness, but the way events are talked about influences your culture and should be addressed.

But however important communication is, there is no doubt that actions speak even louder than words. So, lead by example and give the team what they want – commitment, honesty and consistency.

The R in R.I.D.E. LEADERSHIP stands for RESPECT

Respect your team by being the first to admit you made a mistake. People falsely assume you lose *respect* by making mistakes, but it is how you handle them that earns you *respect*. Don't hesitate to admit your mistakes in front of the whole team, what a great example of trust and humility that will earn you respect. The instant a leader accepts responsibility of mistakes, the leader and the entire team has taken a step toward growth and improved performance.

No excuses should ever come from the mouth of a strong leader. Be the first to say, "my fault" and be the last to point the finger of blame toward others. "I could have done that better", "I made a mistake", or, "I accept responsibility and will be better next time" are all ways to start the conversation. Let your team environment be one where everyone can be comfortable admitting their mistakes as well.

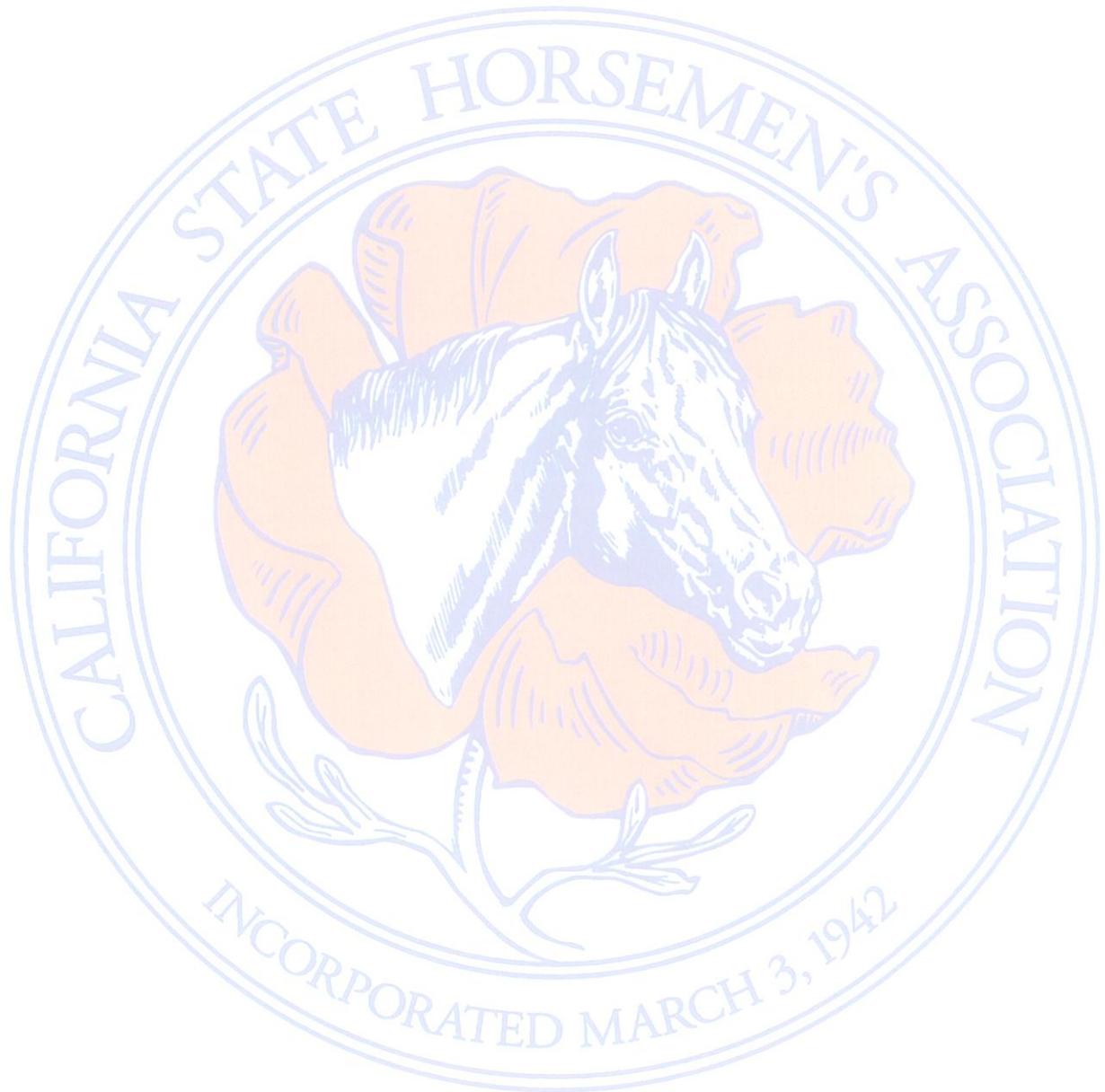
After a practice ride-through be the first to raise your hand and say, "I'm sorry I blew that sweep". No excuses, but if you need help correcting what happened ask for help. "I can never seem to make it in there, what can I do differently?"

Learn to demonstrate *respect* & loyalty before you expect it shown to you as it builds trust. It is belief in each other, which allows teammates to lift each other up, to magnify individual strengths, and diminish individual weaknesses. When teams are respectful and loyal, they do not turn *on* each other, but *to* each other. *Respect* & loyalty is most needed when things are going poorly. It is in those moments that it will be tested. Let your team know that It is okay to question decisions and offer suggestions while you are in the decision-making process, but once the decision has been made, *respect* requires supporting the decision. This is one of the greatest challenges' teams face and must constantly help and remind each other of.

Be willing to make difficult decisions for the sake of the team. As a leader you may not choose the same option that you might make if you were making a decision only for yourself. You must also be willing to at some point to move ahead without people who are unwilling or unable to change.

The real leader may not necessarily be the one who is always loved or admired, but rather the one whose followers know they will make the correct choices for the team.

It is more important to do what is right, than to do what is popular. You must be willing to deal with problems. Keep your eyes open so you can see problems while they are still small, before they become larger. The **best** way to deal with problems is to take steps to prevent as many of them as possible from occurring in the first place, often this occurs through rule establishment and enforcement.



DRAMA

From the time we are young, nice girls are taught to not say mean things to people's faces. better to say it behind their back." And there you have the reason for the drama issues that plague teams with a lot of women.

As a culture we lack skills at handling disagreements face to face? This creates a firestorm of gossip among people who were not, and should not be, involved in the problem. Yet that is what we are taught, generation after generation. We are not being provided the skills to deal with conflict in a productive way. They aren't taught the communication skills they need to be able to have tough conversations, work through an issue, and move on. They aren't held accountable to owning their feelings about a situation and speaking directly to the person with whom they have an issue. To break the cycle of using drama to deal with conflict, we need to understand the process of developing team communication, addressing existing issues, agreeing on how to work through problems in the future, and how to hold each other accountable (to not use gossip, backstabbing and catty behavior). This is one of the key benefits of team sports.

“Drama” isn't conflict, but rather the absence of *communication* about the conflict.

Gossip is the largest player in team drama, is it not? A rider will air details of a conflict to everyone *except* the person with whom they have a problem. Soon cliques start to form. Teammates are pressured into taking sides. This zaps team energy and it is no wonder teams in the throes of emotional drama don't practice or compete up to their potential. There is an expectation that becoming a coach suddenly makes one an expert in team communication and conflict, and that coaches should be able to keep drama from happening. When drama takes on a life of its own, it is called fire storming and there is no way for a coach or a leader to win. It is not usually the coach's fault (unless she or he is involved!), but it certainly is the coach's problem.

The first thing you need to understand to make what we call **Productive Conflict** work is that not all conflict is bad. If a team has no conflict at all, it means someone is lying, or at least hiding the truth, and remember we need honesty to get commitment. Productive Conflict as a tool for creating good ideas and for becoming a better team. The second thing you need to understand is what productive conflict is and why it works.

Productive Conflict

Productive Conflict is realizing and creating an agreement between teammates that they will approach disagreement, misunderstanding, and differences of opinion using a standard set of guidelines. An additional part of the agreement is that gossip or fire storming will not be used and that issues will be taken directly to the person in question.

Productive conflict guidelines look like this:

1. Productive conflict gives people a chance to tell their side of the story without the risk of being verbally or emotionally attacked

2. Allow feelings to get out in the open rather than being bottled up and festering.
3. Creates a confidential space to work through misunderstandings
4. Minimizes defensiveness and the winner/loser mentality
5. Creates an environment where teammates can safely assume everyone involved is trying to achieve a positive result for the whole team.
6. Provides a framework for addressing conflict so it can be dealt with, addressed, and left behind.
7. Provides a way for teammates or coaches to admit when they have made a mistake, apologize, and not be stigmatized for it.

The concept is simple, the challenging part is to get your team to buy into it, use it, and move on.

It would go down in real life something like this:

Mary Sue has been late to the last 2 practices, being late is a part of the description of our principles of Respect. If I am a Drama seeker I would go to other people on the team and say “Mary is disrespecting the team, she is violating the principles by being late, I don’t think she should be able to ride in the next competition. And you probably know how it goes from there; people are taking sides and it creates a firestorm of epic proportions.

Using Productive Conflict guidelines, I would only go directly to Mary Sue and only to Mary Sue and say “Mary Sue, I have an issue I would like to discuss with you is now a good time?” This invites her into the conversation with me and doesn’t blindside her like hitting her unexpectedly with an accusation.

When Mary Sue and I meet I begin by saying “Mary Sue I noticed you been late the last 2 practices, violating our principles of being on time. “I feel let down, disappointed, and feel like maybe you don’t have the commitment we require to ride in competition”. (Always use “I” when discussing your feelings, they are your feelings, own them. It also makes it less accusatory than by saying “You let me down and disappointed me”) Mary Sue is less likely to get defensive if you own your part of it by using “I” or think the team is ganging up on her by using “We”.

Then I might say “Is there something going on that I can help you with?” Mary Sue says “I’m sorry! I should have told you and the team that I had an emergency dental issue and the only time I could get in to the dentist was really pushing me to get to practice on time, I tried, really, I did. I had to go back at the same time a week later to finish the procedure. But now it is taken care of and I will not be late again. Thank you for coming to me and I will explain it to the team and apologize.”

Mary Sue explains and apologizes to the team and it is over, and we move on with no residual hard feelings. I let her tell her side, got my feeling out, we kept it between us initially, I minimized defensiveness by owning my feelings, I made it known that the good of the team was at issue. As a result, we dealt with it, addressed it and left it behind.

Do you see the difference in how handling the issue using productive conflict guidelines would make an enormous difference in the drama level of your team? It takes less time, less emotional involvement, and lets us get back to focusing on our team goals. It takes practice, and understanding on everyone’s part but it will allow you to ***Just R.I.D.E.***

Taking Charge

Drama seekers, or Drama Queens are given their power by the team and the team can remove the power by taking a stand. If the team commits to bring back the power to the whole group a drama seeker will either come in line with the group or go find other people that will put up with their drama.

Don't allow drama & bullying to take place around you. When you hear someone say something mean, act hatefully, or tear others down but say nothing, your silence is agreement. Simply saying, "it is not okay with me for you to talk like that about others" will make it clear that you do not condone that behavior. If you have bought into a team pledge, you may say "Just Ride."

Be compassionate and teach others compassion. It is not that difficult to be nice. Check in with people, ask how they are doing. If you hurt someone's feelings apologize.

Gather your own information. Don't take the easy way out and believe whatever you hear, find out the truth for yourself. Learn firsthand not by hearsay.

Hold yourself and others accountable to the rule that if someone has a problem with someone else, they need to have a conversation with that person about it. The people involved must learn to work through issues between themselves.

Listen. You will hear mumbblings on your team, pay attention. Don't ignore little things, allowing them to grow into big things. Address drama right away.

Talk to the drama seeker. Calling someone out on their inappropriate behavior is one of the hardest, but most productive, things a leader can do. Talk specifically about behavior that needs to change. Ask questions about what drives them to behave that way. What do they think they are gaining by their actions and why they target the people they do? Often it is their own insecurities driving their behavior. Many people have fallen into a habit of negative drama seeking behavior without even realizing it. Calling them on it may provide the wakeup call they need.

Many of the concepts discussed here are derived from the Positive Coaching Alliance, positivecoaching.org. They offer many books on various coaching topics that are extremely insightful and helpful. If you are a new coach or an experienced coach with a team that has a lot of drama check out the booklets offered by the Alliance.

Leaders are people that have a vision for the future, and leadership is guiding, influencing and inspiring people towards that vision. Some people are born with a natural innate ability to lead others, but almost anyone with a willingness to do so can learn to lead. Leadership is a skillset that you can use in every aspect of life so the investment you make in learning the skills is well

worth it. Learning it while doing something you are passionate about, like drill, makes it much more enjoyable.

