

The Courage to Win™ in Sport: Perform Your Best Under Pressure 30 Day Advanced HOME STUDY Program with Lisa Lane Brown

Lesson 4

The Art Of Leadership: How To Create Trust And Respect With Teammates, Coaches, And Competitors

What is Leadership?

Leadership is a complex subject, and we could devote an entire course to this topic alone. For the purposes of this training, I'm going to offer a simple yet powerful definition: Leadership is the ability to inspire by 'giving courage to' yourself or others.

No matter how mentally tough you are, your environment affects you. To truly reach your potential, you need to:

- 1) Gain the support of the people in your competing environment: coaches, parents, team members, and even competitors.
- 2) Deal with people who treat you poorly or underrate you so you are not distracted or agitated by them when competing.

Mastering these two issues will help you pull off consistently great performances. Of course, once you are extremely consistent, you will be the kind of athlete or coach who inspires everyone around him/her. You will have 'will to win' - that intangible factor that attracts victory even in dire circumstances and amazes everyone around you.

How to Gain Support

When competing, you need support in many forms: praise, small kindnesses, assistance with daily duties in training and competition, technical tips, tactical advice...the list is long. Here are some strategies for getting these things from the people around you.

“Ask and You Shall Receive”

The first strategy is simple. It is to *ask for the support you need*.

“Ask and you shall receive” is simple in theory, yet hard to put into practice. It means giving your coach, parent or friend the benefit of the doubt. Assume she doesn’t know what you want, and ask her for support in a friendly, low-key way.

This means getting good at making requests. The key to making a request is to state it like a question.

Here’s a solid request: “If you feel I played well, could you tell me exactly why you thought so after the game? Positive feedback from you really pumps me up.” Or,

“If I’m getting agitated at the officials, ask me to sit down for 5 times and take a time out while you handle the team...that’ll calm me down.”

Most of us are quite poor at this. What we’re really good at is complaining. We say things like, “I wish you were more positive!” or, “You never say anything good to me after the game.” Or, we simply avoid the person and seethe with resentment.

The problem with complaining is that people perceive it as criticism, and nobody likes to be criticized.

Besides, if you think about it, your complaint is really a ‘wanna be’ request anyway. You want something, and you’re complaining because you’re not getting it.

Here’s the most important point: when you complain, your coach or teammate stops seeing *his lack of support* as the problem. Instead, he starts seeing *your complaining* as the problem. When this happens, he is much more likely to rebel and not to give you what you want.

If your friend truly doesn’t know what you want, a simple request may get you the support you need (as long as you ask for it in a friendly way).

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 17

Pick a type of support you have complained about not getting in the past. This week, instead of complaining about it, *make a request for what you want*.

For example, if you usually complain to your coach about your schedule, ask him or her for the scheduling change you want. If you want an athlete to lead a team discussion, ask her to do it.

Pick an issue related to your sport if applicable, or use a life issue if nothing fits this week.

Describe what request you made and how you felt about it. Was it difficult to ask for what you want? Was it challenging to drop the complaining? Did you find it hard to make the request in a friendly way? Were you afraid of rejection?

“Do Unto Others”

Sometimes people don't support you because *you do not really support them in your heart.*

In these situations, you need to invoke the Golden Rule: 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' The Golden Rule is the basis of 90% of all religions in the world, and there is a reason - it works. This means supporting other people even **before** they support you.

The hard part about supporting others is that most elite athletes are competitive of everyone around them, whether they are **aware of this or** not. It is hard to genuinely support people when we secretly want to be superior to them.

If you are a coach, there is usually a different reason why you withhold support from athletes: it's because you resent them -- either for not performing better, for not supporting you, etc. If you resent them for underperforming, it's likely that your resentment stems from the fact that you are taking their underperformance personally. When you withhold support, it's usually an unconscious (or conscious!) attempt to communicate your disapproval to them. Secretly, you believe that if you support them conditionally (approval if they win, disapproval if they lose), they will perform better. In reality, the opposite is true, but because you are angry, there is a part of you that wants revenge on your athletes for not performing better. If you resent an athlete for not supporting or following you, this will be obvious to you when you read this paragraph...enough said. 😊

The Abundance Mentality

To truly gain the support of others, I recommend cultivating an **abundance mentality** towards everyone around you.

The best way to explain the abundance mentality is by describing its opposite: the scarcity mentality.

When we have the scarcity mentality, we believe there is a finite amount of success and recognition to go around. We see success as a pie. If someone else gets a big slice of it, we believe our slice will be smaller. When someone else does well, we feel this takes away from our accomplishments.¹

My own scarcity mentality is the biggest reason I started doing mental training. In 1991, when my team lost the National ringette championship with one second left on the clock, I officially hit 'rock bottom.' We lost the biggest game of the year, and I personally choked in the game.

The worst part was that a teammate of mine was brilliant in the final. It was the first time our team had been in a nationally televised game, and she got all 5 goals our team had scored...we lost 6-5.

I was devastated. I said nice things to her, but inwardly I was eating my heart out. I wanted to be happy for her, but I wasn't...I was jealous. I wanted to be a leader on my team, but I honestly didn't know how. This was the day I got serious about mental training, because it really bothered me that I wasn't real leader.

When we have the abundance mentality, we believe there is plenty of success and recognition to go around. Other people's success does not diminish ours. We develop *positive rivalries*. When a competitor does well, we think, "Good! He's forcing me to be better!"

Positive Rivalries

Olympic speed skater Susan Auch has a wonderful story about positive rivalries:

In 1996, Catriona LeMay Doan asked if she could train with me and my coach. At the time, she was one of the most promising up-and-coming female speed skaters in the world.

My coach was my brother and one of the finest coaches in the world. I was afraid if Catriona trained with us, she would actually become better than me.

At first, I decided to say no. I did not want to risk helping one of my main opponents. Eventually, though, I changed my mind. I saw that Catriona would help me as much as I would help her. In 1998, Catriona won the gold medal in the Olympics. I won the silver. It broke my heart to not be the best in the world. However, we were #1 and #2 in the world and I knew the reason we got to the podium was because we pushed each other to get there.

How To Develop Abundance Mentality

1. Accept Yourself

The first way to cultivate the abundance mentality is to let yourself experience your feelings of disappointment, failure, and shame when another athlete does better than you. As you confront these feelings head on, you will rid yourself of the irrational fear of them.

If another athlete in your sport is better at a particular skill than you, do not evade this fact in your mind. Accept and experience the feelings this reality triggers in you, and you will heal yourself of your disappointment.

As you do this, your self-love will grow and you will stop looking to your accomplishments to provide self-esteem. Genuine self-esteem comes from accepting your feelings, not establishing your superiority over others. Superiority is the icing; the cake is self-acceptance.

If you are a coach, you can use self-acceptance to be more *unconditionally supportive* of your athletes. First, confront your disappointment about losing. Second, channel your anger at your athletes into solutions. Do you need to change strategies? Review videotape? Recruit better athletes? If you are taking their poor performance personally, realize that even in the worst case scenario -- they were performing poorly to annoy you -- that they did this because they are upset at being conditionally supported...and you can change all that in the future.

2. Imagine a 'Win-Win' Scenario

When you are preparing for a major competition, imagine how much you'll benefit from having a 'win-win' mentality. The 'win-win' mindset is the opposite of a scarcity mentality. It is the idea that both of you excelling is a good thing. Notice I used the word 'excel', not 'win'. In sport, there are times when you will want to be the victor. However, you can still imagine a scenario in which both of you performs wonderfully - and this is desirable for you.

For many years, my sister and I played ringette together on the National team and we had a sibling rivalry going.

It was the classic "win-lose" paradigm, where if one of us played well, the other person's game would go into the toilet.

In 1992, before the World Championship final against Finland, I was scared because while I felt confident, I was worried that my sister would get agitated if I shone. I knew we would both have to play well to win, and I wanted us both to have our GAME FACE handled.

I pulled her aside the day of the final and said, "Cara, I need your permission to play my game." She knew what that meant...I would come out scoring. She thought about it for a good three minutes before answering.

"You got it," she said.

We won, 6-5, and it was the first time we both excelled in a final.

3. Develop Your Mental Toughness

It's critical that you continue to develop your mental toughness using the strategies in this program.

As you become more and more skilled mentally, your performance will improve, and you will fulfill your own potential. Your personal confidence will grow, and your ability to support others will increase, because you will be able to be generous with them.

4. Verbally Praise Others

Start supporting others by complimenting them. Encourage literally means 'to give courage to'. Make your life a place where 'never is heard a discouraging word.' Resolve to be a source of inspiration to those around you. Do this with authenticity: when you think a positive thought about someone, tell him right away. This will take you no extra time or effort. You will be surprised by the pleasure and energy you get when you do this regularly.

If you are a coach, the best way to cultivate the abundance mentality is to avoid explicitly favouring some athletes over others. Of course, you will always have your favourites, but you'll want to go out of your way to avoid incurring hostility between athletes. Be exquisitely aware how much you talk to some vs. others, especially your compliments and smiles.

“Stop The Pressure”

The second strategy for gaining support is to stop pressuring other people for it.

Sometimes the people around you - coaches, team members, fellow competitors - don't support you because they are subconsciously jealous of your success. This can even apply to parents who want you to win but feel jealous of you when you do! (especially those who live vicariously through their children).

When someone is jealous, he tries to dampen your happiness by subtly rejecting you and withholding support.

Other times, the people around you are not envious at all. They just feel pressured by you to provide support and are rebelling against it. This is especially true if you tend to blame them in your mind for your self-doubt or poor results. If, on any level, you are pressuring them for approval, they will react away from pressure and tend to withhold it.

If either of these two dynamics is present, **reducing pressure on people** will loosen their resistance to supporting you.

A recent client of mine used this strategy.

Shan, a basketball player I worked with, became upset when her team member Heather did not support her. Heather wasn't negative... It's just that she wasn't very friendly and rarely said anything positive when Shan excelled. Shan was very skilled, so it was obvious Heather wasn't frustrated with her performance.

As we talked, Shan realized that for most of the season she had spent a lot of time trying to win Heather over. She was very nice to her, encouraging her in practices and games. As the captain, she even recommended that Heather be named an assistant captain. One game, however, Shan became demoralized when she scored the winning basket and Heather walked off the floor without even congratulating her.

After we talked, Shan stopped trying so hard with Heather. Instead of trying to please her, she started treating Heather like everyone else. When Heather did good things on the court, Shan congratulated her...casually.

Off the court, Shan didn't make extra effort to share rides, swap jokes, or sit next to Heather in the dressing room. When they spoke, she was friendly, but kept their contact brief.

The first day Shan acted like this, Heather asked her if she was in a bad mood. Shan just smiled and said, "No...I'm having a great day." (It was true: she was having a great day).

The following weekend, when the team met in the hotel, Heather ran in and greeted Shan as though she were a long lost relative. Heather paid special attention to Shan that weekend. Shan was so shocked that she phoned me from the road to tell me about the change in Heather's behaviour.

Why Stopping The Pressure Works

'Want, Not Need'

Upon reading this scenario, you may be tempted to conclude that Shan was manipulating Heather.

Not so. **Shan merely decided that she did not need Heather's support.**

In Lesson 1, I talked about the concept of 'want, not need.' I explained that pressure does not work. When we put pressure on ourselves, we perform worse. So, pressure doesn't work with us.

Pressure doesn't work with other people, either.

Pressure creates tension and stress in relationships

When you want someone to do something and she doesn't want to do it, this creates tension in the relationship. There is tension, and there is stress.

There is stress because both people want different things. Both people think they are right, and both want to be in control.

Shan wanted Heather to be positive and supportive, but Heather wasn't ready to give Shan this support. As long as Shan was resisting Heather by insisting that she was entitled to Heather's support, there would always be tension between them.

We are all stubborn when it comes to relationships. We want our way. This is natural, but it is self-defeating when we are trying to get 'more' from a relationship (more support, more time, more love, etc.). This is why serious talk harms a relationship when you want 'more' from someone. Most professionals encourage people to engage in serious talk when they have this problem.

The problem with serious talk is that it's a form of pressure. What you are really saying to your coach, parent, or friend is that you want him or her to change. You are rejecting the person, and violating his right to be himself.

If you're not convinced of this idea, stop pressuring your coach, parent, or team member to support you in the form of compliments, assistance, good attitude, smiles, etc. Stop all this. Relax and have fun, and watch the relationship improve immediately. (Note: You may be only pressuring this person in your mind with thoughts like, "She should be more supportive.").

Pressure is a form of blame

The second problem with expressing our feelings in serious talk is that usually, we do this in blame.

Emotions are like a hot potato. We feel hurt, we don't know what to do with our hurt, and it feels unbearable. So we critique others as a way of throwing them the hot potato. It's like saying, "Here, you have the hurt. I can't handle it anymore."

Unfortunately, this doesn't work. Usually we feel worse at the end of the conversation than we did at the beginning.

All we have done is re-suppress our negative feelings again. Except now, we have hurt someone who will try to hurt us back, and the cycle continues.

This is not to say we should never experience emotions in the presence of another person. Experiencing feelings in the presence of someone who accepts us can be tremendously healing. This is the principle behind much therapy.

Talking about our feelings is not the issue. It's why we are talking about them that is the issue. If we share feelings in an attempt to get away from our own negative feelings, it is self-defeating.

What about "Ask and you shall receive?"

I am not saying you should never ask for what you want from a coach, friend, etc. When you ask for what you want, you are displaying self-acceptance and self-assertiveness. These are good things. It is important for you to teach people what you need in order to excel. This is one of your most important responsibilities as an athlete.

However, making requests only works **if you do it a non-resentful, non-blaming way**. Otherwise, it will likely be perceived as criticism.

What about abuse?

I am also not suggesting you should tolerate abuse of any kind. Remember, I am talking about situations in which you want a person to *start* doing

something, such as support you. You will need to use a different strategy when you want someone to *stop* doing something, such as criticize you.

I am merely pointing out that no one is obligated to support you, and that you will be more likely to get support if you give others psychological freedom. There is an unwritten law of all relationships: **“Anything a person chases in life runs away.”**

The more you tell yourself you need someone’s approval, the harder it is going to be for you to get it.

Avoid the ‘cold’ person Embrace the ‘warm’ person

Sometimes it is complicated when dealing with a friend because there seem to be two people in the same body. He’s a cold person one day and a warm, supportive person the next.

Your job is simple: ***Avoid the cold person and embrace the warm person.***

Let’s imagine you have a coach who tends to be moody before you compete. Sometimes this even affects your performance, because you take it personally and feel down when he doesn’t pump you up.

In this situation, most people would do what Shan did. They’ll try hard to please the coach when he’s in a bad mood. They’ll go out of their way to be friendly and nice. This never works.

When someone is being cold towards you and you are nice back, you are saying that you want someone to be cold to you. This is the wrong move.

As long as you act like you want someone to treat you coldly by being super-friendly, you’re never going to get the warm coach. **You’ve got to avoid the cold coach if you’re ever going to get the warm coach.** Keep your contact with the cold coach brief. This way, you’re not creating a distraction for yourself prior to competing. You’re also not creating a reason to become angry and resentful of your coach.

People do not respond to negative words, but they do respond to action.

When you accept others for who they are using these methods, you communicate self-esteem and flexibility. You’re saying, “I don’t need you to be any particular way at all.” Obviously, if you find that you must avoid a person 90% of the time, you might want to consider abandoning the relationship.

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Avoidance is not manipulation. It is acceptance.

The reason Shan was successful with Heather is precisely **because** she wasn't trying to manipulate her. Instead of trying to change Heather by being super-nice, she merely *reduced their contact as long as Heather was withholding support.*

Using avoidance and indifference with people when they are unsupportive is a radical concept. Most of us need to be in control. If a person is not giving us the support we want, we try to control him. We go back and forth between being angry vs. nice in an attempt to get our way. This never works, because the person we are dealing with senses what we are doing and rebels even more.

The main reason we try to control others is because we become self-critical, ashamed, and angry when we do not get the response we want from them. These feelings are natural.

How to stop pressuring others

It is easy to say that we should stop pressing others for support and approval. What are the practical steps to doing so?

1. Question your beliefs

In sport, there are many commonly accepted beliefs that no one questions. Here are a few:

Team members should support each other all the time.

- Everyone on the team should like me.
- My coach/parents should be positive all the time.
- If a team member doesn't get to play, he should be happy for the team anyway.

I think it is desirable to strive for these ideals, but sometimes they are just not realistic. Shan was successful with Heather because she questioned her belief of "Everyone on the team must like me."

Shan realized that out of 13 players on her team, 12 liked her. She decided this was a pretty good situation. So when she thought about Heather, she would say to herself, "*Relax. You don't need your way here. Besides, Heather has the right to dislike you if she wants.*" This would calm Shan down so she felt less reactive towards Heather.

2. Confront your emotional dependence

When it's hard for us to stop pressuring someone for more support, love, affection, etc. we can be sure we are emotionally dependent on that person.

Usually, when a friend does not respond to us the way we would like, we feel rejection and shame. We feel as though our intrinsic worth as a person is being threatened, and we are ashamed for having made ourselves vulnerable to this person. Also, we criticize ourselves for not having the power to get our friend to treat us the way we would like.

The best way to deal with your emotional reaction is to accept it and experience your feelings without resistance. Of course you are going to feel this way. The more important the person is to you, the worse you will feel.

Do not try to force yourself to have a different emotional reaction—this will only make you feel worse.

How to Stop People from Verbally Abusing You

This is rare, but you may come across a situation where someone is verbally abusive towards you.

This comes under the category of wanting someone to stop doing things. Abuse can include a coach, parent or team member yelling at you, insulting you, or benching you for no reason.

“I Cannot Allow You To Vent Upon Me”

If someone in your competing environment is abusive towards you, indifference is definitely NOT the solution. You need to take decisive action.

First, you must act immediately upon the heels of the abusive action. **Do not wait until after the competition is over to address it.** The technical term for what you are doing is extinguishing this person's behaviour using punishment.

If you have a pet, you've used this principle. If your dog goes to the bathroom on the carpet, you cannot wait an hour to punish him. You must deliver your reprimand immediately or the dog will become terribly confused (not to mention the fact that he'll do it again).

The simplest way to handle verbal abuse is to turn to the person abusing you, put your palm out towards the person and say firmly, **“I understand you are frustrated right now, but I cannot allow you to vent on me.”**

A variation of this statement is: **“I’m sorry, but I cannot allow you to speak to me this way. You will speak to me with respect, or not at all.”**

People are very responsive to body language. Research in self-defense shows that if you are being followed, the best thing to do is to turn, put your palm out towards the person and say, “Stop.” Nine times out of the ten, the bad guy will stop in his tracks. So using firm body language is important.

Your tone of voice is important, too. Make eye contact and speak loudly. Make sure the person sees that you are serious.

If the abuse continues, **you must remove yourself immediately from the situation.** This is critical, for you are teaching this person how to treat you.

Once, I worked with a badminton player whose doubles partner was verbally abusive to her. She literally had to leave the court during an important match to establish that she would not tolerate abuse. If this seems like a major sacrifice, remember: no athletic victory is worth more than your dignity.

You may compete in the kind of sport that doesn’t give you enough time to use this approach. For example, you’re a hockey player and there is a team member who yells at you during shift changes. In a case like this, your best bet is to quickly snap, **“Don’t yell at me,”** as you hop onto the bench. Trust me, it will work.

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 18

It’s time to get specific and use what you’ve learned in this lesson to take your leadership to the next level. With a specific person in mind, write down 5-10 different endings for the following sentence.

1. I want [person X] to start -

Here are some examples:

◆ I want Shauna to start—

- saying ‘good shift’ at the end of my shift
- talking to me more in the dressing room
- passing to me more during games
- talking to me on road trips
- talking to me about strategy on the bench

◆ I want my Dad to start—

- telling me what I did right during the game
- talking about the good things our team did today
- praising me for my hard work, whether we won or not

- praising me for my efforts to score, whether I did or not
- listening quietly when I talk about my frustrations

Make sure you describe observable behaviours only. For example, if you wrote, “I want Joan to start saying ‘great game’ to me after I play well,” this is more specific than saying, “I want Joan to start recognizing my good games.” Please be specific in terms of what behaviour you want from this person. Saying you want ‘recognition’ or ‘respect’ from someone still doesn’t clarify exactly what behaviour you are seeking.

Finish this sentence completion below:

Once you are done this sentence completion, do the same thing for the following sentence:

1. I want [person X] to stop—

For example,

◆ I want my Dad to stop—

- complaining about the people on my team who are weak
- listing all the reasons we lost right after the game
- telling me the coach doesn’t know what he is doing
- coaching me in the car all the way home from the game
- telling me just to ‘skate up to the net and shoot it in’

Again, make sure you describe *observable behaviour*. For example, you might write, “I want Grant to stop telling me how to improve during the game because it distracts me.” At this point, you should have a concrete idea of what behaviours you want and don’t want from this person. If you still aren’t sure, write 5 different endings for both sentences each day for the next 7 days until you have more clarity.

Write your sentence completions below:

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 19

Now that you know what you want from the person you have selected, it's time for you to develop a strategy to get what you want from him or her. Which strategy is the best one?

For example, if you've been pressuring someone for acceptance, then 'avoid the cold person and embrace the warm person' would be the best option to try next. If you're the type of athlete who is really competitive with others and this makes teammates or competitors reject you, then developing an abundance mentality is a good option. If you're a coach who is having trouble getting your athletes to 'care', ease off pressuring them and see if this makes a difference. If you're dealing with a bully, then saying, "I'm sorry, I know you're upset, but I can't allow you to vent your frustration on me," would be a good route. If you need more help getting ready to compete, ask a parent/coach/manager to pick up the slack.

In the space below, write down what you will do over the next week to get what you need from this person:

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 20

Please write a description of how you have evolved as a person and athlete over the course of this training. What have you learned? How has this impacted your mental game? How have you changed your approach to training and competing?

If you would like to add any suggestions or comments about this course for improvement, please do so. You can send them to my office at info@lisabrown.ca. We welcome all comments and success stories and respond to them personally.

Congratulations!

Congratulations on completing this course. It is a very demanding one, and you showed tremendous openness and courage in signing up for it. Please take time to review this material and re-do the mental toughness action assignments many, many times. You will find that you learn something about yourself each time you go through the course. It is designed to be completed a minimum of 3-5 times. Also, remember to review Lisa's Coaching Answers for this week's assignments.

It's been a pleasure working with you. If you would like to contact me about any part of this training, please do so at the address below. I hope to work with you again. Best wishes in your athletic endeavors. I wish you all good things in sport. ☺

Your friend,
Lisa Lane Brown

Lesson 4 Endnotes

1. Covey, Stephen. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, 1989.

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