

# Good Lessons from Coaching Kids' Basketball

A good coach gets the whole gang to listen, and to play together as a team

By Bryan Rader ■ MediaWorks

I was recently fortunate enough to have the opportunity to coach my six-year old son's basketball team. I think I got as much out of it as the kids did during our season.

There are many similarities between coaching a kid's team and managing a business; and I'm not sure which one is more difficult.

The primary challenge in coaching is getting the kids to listen. At practice, they all want to shoot, run, or wrestle. It is not easy to get them to line up for a dribbling or passing drill without three boys complaining that "he butted in line" or "quit pushing me in the back" or "he stole my ball." It's enough to create a coaching migraine.

But there is a special way to make six-year old kids listen to the coach...and it is a similar process with employees. Little basketball players want to have fun. They want to shoot, and they want to compete. They love games, especially shooting games. They want to win – first one in line, first one at the drinking fountain, first one to make a lay-up.

Associates on your company team are the same way. The best way to have them listen to you is to understand what's important to them. What do they value? What are they striving for? Why do they work for you?

It's the same way in basketball as it is in business. Not all of your players will be future Michael Jordans. So the coach has to find a way to create that determination and drive in each of his players, or his employees.

Each kid may be playing for a different reason – some want to win, some want to

have fun, some kids just look forward to snack time after practice. It's the same with employees. Some want more money, others want recognition, and other staff members may want an office with a window. It's the coach's responsibility to determine each individual's desires and motivations.

It was a big challenge as a basketball coach to teach six-year olds to pass the ball to their teammates. I can't tell you how many times I must have yelled "pass the ball to Johnny. He's wide open under the net!" A few of the kids liked to hog the ball. They dribbled down the court, not paying any attention to where their teammates were, or what the best plan might be to find an open shot. They would simply shoot the ball once they got hung up and stopped dribbling.

This is a coach's nightmare. Basketball, like business, is not an individual sport. It is a team sport, and you need to incorporate every ballplayer (or every employee) into the plan. The coach must create the environment where everyone on the team works together, and works off the same game plan. It is the coach's responsibility to educate every player on where to stand, whom to pass to, and what to look for during the game. The coach in business must do the same thing. All employees should know the game plan and their role in that plan.

There is nothing worse than being in a staff meeting and having one department head say to another, "but I thought *you* were handling that for Monday." And the other department head says, "no, isn't that part of your job?" A good manager (just like a good coach) makes sure that everyone on

the team knows exactly what their role is, and the expectations for their position.

Finally, a good coach must recognize the strengths of each of his players. Some of our kids were good dribblers and passers. Others were great rebounders. Some kids play better with other kids, too. It was key to determine the capability of each child, and to put them in a position to succeed. You don't want to put one of your shorter kids up against a taller, more developed one, and ask him to guard him from scoring. You'll never win.

In business, it's the same thing. A good manager will determine the strengths of each associate, and put him or her in a position to succeed. Some of our technicians are great engineers, but they never should speak to a customer. Others are great with customers and property managers, but wouldn't respond well to a system outage. Know their strengths and use them effectively.

Coaching my little son's basketball team was a true learning experience for me. It made me realize that managing a business and coaching a team have numerous similarities. Oh, and Phil Jackson has nothing to worry about – this young basketball coach is sticking with the PCO business. ♦

## About The Author

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