



# Why A Positive Culture Matters When Coaches Come And Go

*This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.*

**“We are currently going through a coaching change. As with most coaching changes, there are people that pleased and people that are unhappy. As a PCA committee member for our team, I am looking for articles or information to help parents guide them positively through a coaching change. If you have information on this topic, it would be greatly appreciated.”**

## PCA Response by PCA Lead Trainer, Joe Terrasi

Thank you for the thoughtful question. This is closely related to the work we do as PCA trainers when we facilitate “Leading Your Organization” workshops. These workshops – and the thoughts I’ll offer here – come down to one incredibly important word: *Culture*.

I’ll offer a summary of some of our thoughts on culture, then make some comments on how it relates to a coaching change. In a simple nutshell, culture is defined as “the way we do things here.” This is a deceptively nuanced phrase. All organizational cultures are built as a blend of explicit and implicit (or hidden) expectations. In many cases, some of our powerful implicit expectations are actually contrary to the explicit norms or goals we’ve articulated. This gives us two important goals in establishing our cultural norms: We must explicitly articulate what our most critical norms are, and we must fearlessly assess whether some of our implicit norms are at odds with what we really want. It may help to assess the current culture as if you were a brand new family entering the program for the first time. If there are things that we will just have to “learn as we go through the program,” these indicate implicit cultural norms that we have not articulated and thoroughly propagated.

It’s unlikely that a mission statement on a website or a few words in a once-a-season parent letter will result in a true understanding and adoption of the organization’s culture. In order for families to know what things are most important in our culture, we must constantly bombard them with the message.

Creating and nurturing culture in a youth sports program is similar to doing so in the workplace – but with a key difference: We’ve consistently found that youth sports programs that have not tended carefully to their culture have a consistent outcome – they adopt a culture of “winning at all costs” – often at the expense of the athletes’ development and love of the sport. The converse is also true: If an organization’s culture has

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become one of “winning at all costs,” it is likely that leaders have not done effective, systematic work building and nurturing a positive culture focused on the needs (both in sport and life) of the youth athletes.

We work carefully with youth and education-based sports organizations to identify cultural roles for each of four groups: **Coaches** are called on to be “double goal coaches” who teach striving to win and important life lessons. **Parents** are enjoined to act as “second-goal parents” who amplify the life lessons being taught by the coaches. **Athletes** are challenges to become “triple-impact competitors” who make themselves, their team, and their sport better. **Leaders** have the tough job. They are at task to become “single goal leaders” and take on the responsibility to create and nurture a culture that becomes a development zone in which athletes can thrive athletically and personally.

Leading in this way is extremely challenging. While building culture is the most important job they have, leaders are still on the hook to fulfill challenging (and seemingly endless) administrative responsibilities. They have to manage facilities, finances, registration, uniforms, and more. But it is important to make the distinction between administration and leadership. Excellent administration has to take place for the organization to run, but the role of a leader is to build, nurture, and sometimes repair one thing: culture.

By now, you may be thinking, “I thought I asked about a coaching change – you’re going on about culture.” I agree that a coaching change is challenging for an organization. As you aptly describe, it is not uncommon for some families to be thrilled by the change and for others to struggle with it. The key is that a strong organization hires and develops coaches to align with its culture – not the other way around. If a new coach dictates culture that is not consistent with the desired culture – then the organization’s leaders may find that they have not built strong enough “cultural pillars” to withstand one differing voice.

Thus the call is not to help families rally around a new coach so much as to become members of – and advocates for – a clearly defined organizational culture. As we seek new coaching candidates or develop a new coach, we have to be clear and firm about helping the coach understand that he or she works for the organization and its needs, not the other way around.

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