

# GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

*Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports*

## **3 Contagious Mindsets You DON'T Want on Your Team**

**By David Benzel**



What do all of these things have in common?

- Covid-19
- Gossip
- Laughter
- Applause
- Measles
- Fashion Trends
- Yawning
- Fear

# GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

*Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports*

If you guessed that they all are contagious and can spread quickly from person to person, then you would be right.

**Certain mindsets – positive and negative – have this same quality.**

In fact, there is quite a bit of research in the field of neuroscience that supports the idea that mindsets (and emotions) are [contagious](#).

**If you coach a youth sports team, this is valuable information.**

Undoubtedly, there are some unhelpful mindsets that pop up often in the team sports environment. If left unchecked, they can spread – like a disease – among team members. And as the coach, you are largely responsible for the culture of the team.

Here are three of them to keep on your radar – and three opposite attitudes that can turn things around.

## **1) Selfishness**

Zac is the star player on his soccer team – and he knows it. Anyone watching him play can discern very quickly that he has a LOT of natural talent.

Unfortunately, it is also obvious that he can be selfish with the ball. Even if there is a perfect opportunity to pass to a teammate, he almost always chooses to dribble the ball until he can take the shot himself.

**His selfish approach to playing does not empower the rest of his team to reach their potential.**

It is human nature to be selfish and we all struggle with it in varying degrees. Our culture reinforces it with statements like, “It’s all about ME,” or “Have it YOUR way.”

However, this mindset can be toxic to the growth of any team.

**So how can you train your athletes to be GIVING instead of selfish?**

# GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

*Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports*

## Try this:

- Have weekly conversations with your team about the priority of working AS a team. Give them specific examples of what that looks like.
- Reward athletes openly when they make choices that are generous or giving toward their teammates.
- If you have an athlete that tends to make selfish decisions often, pull him aside individually and talk about how playing as a team benefits everyone AND makes him a better overall player.

## 2) Negativity

Allison seems to have a lot of “C” in her life – and it is not vitamin C. She spends a lot of time **complaining, criticizing, and condemning**. Sometimes it is aimed at the opponents her team is facing. Occasionally it is directed at certain teammates and then there are days when it is focused on her coach.

Instead of concentrating on winning, she obsesses about **not** losing. And when other athletes are thinking about how to get a run, she is fixated on **not** striking out.

She definitely views the world through “the-glass-is-half-empty” lens. Unfortunately, her negative attitude is infectious and impacts the whole team.

**Positivity, however, can be equally contagious and is very beneficial to the efforts of the team.**

## Try this:

- As the coach, you set the tone every day during practice and the way in which you talk about upcoming games and/or opponents – be purposeful about keeping it positive.
- Choose team captains that see the world as, “the-glass-is-half-full” and even overflowing.
- Encourage your athletes to use positive language always. Train them to have positive self-talk during practice as much as during competition.

### 3) Indifference

Sam is not looking forward to the meet on Saturday. He hates getting up early on the weekend. His parents will be stressed about how he does. And he just wants the season to be over so that he has more time for the things HE wants to do.

His dad was a swimmer and is sure that it is good for Sam and that he will eventually come to love it. Sam is not convinced.

His coach is a nice guy but it is hard for Sam to be enthusiastic about something he doesn't enjoy or even want to do.

His low energy at practice and his lack of personal investment at the meets do not go unnoticed by his team. In fact, it even rubs off on some of them.

At times a coach will face this particular mindset because an athlete is either burnt out or being forced by a parent to participate.

**Learning to respect the process or the journey can help an athlete who is indifferent toward winning.**

#### Try this:

- Get to know your athletes. If you show effort in engaging in their life they may reciprocate with investing in the team.
- If you believe that the athlete is burnt out, set up a time to meet with the parents to talk about taking a break for a season.
- Keep practices fresh and fun. Change things up. Sometimes an athlete that is bored responds well to a more creative approach to practicing drills.

#### Model the Mindsets You Want

The power of a contagious mindset doesn't have to be a negative thing. Choose the mindsets that you want from your athletes and model them every day. Your leadership determines where the team will go.

In addition, be intentional and talk about the helpful mindsets – not just on game day, but every time the team is together.

Inspire your athletes to embrace mindsets like a giving attitude, positivity, and respect for the process, as not only part of the team identity but also as a personal identity.

# GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

*Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports*

**David Benzel** is the Founder and Executive Director of [Growing Champions for Life, Inc.](http://www.growingchampionsforlife.com), which provides parents and coaches with practical tools & positive strategies for helping athletes reach their full potential while enjoying the youth sport experience. David is also the author of *"From Chump to Champ - How Individuals Go From Good to Great"* [www.growingchampionsforlife.com](http://www.growingchampionsforlife.com)