

What's Your Role?

As a coach, my role in the development of life skills and assets in my athletes is to create, maintain, and promote a safe environment in which they can use sport to discover and develop themselves. From a broad perspective, and using the Search Institute's list of 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents (ages 12-18), my role as a coach is to provide the external assets, or opportunity for the athlete to fulfill the external assets, that enable the young person the tools and stimulus to develop the internal assets.

To get more specific, as the young athlete participates in my program, they should daily receive external asset stimulus whose goal is two-fold. The first, and more obvious goal (at least to the athlete), is to develop a skill, competency, or asset in the sport that is beneficial to the athlete and/or the team in their pursuit of success. The second, and more inconspicuous, goal is to develop, strengthen, or lay the foundation for an internal asset that will enable the athlete to develop positively overall, as a skilled athlete, but more importantly as a person. For example, I ask each of my baseball players to bring a quotation to practice at least once each season that they believe has a direct correlation to our team and season thus far. At the end of practice, the player will explain to the team why they chose that quotation and analyze it in relation to the team. In doing this, I aim to touch on a number of external assets, but one that sticks out is "Community Values Youth". By assigning the athlete this task, I communicate to them that I value their opinion of the team and trust in their ability to fulfill this introspective and critical task. By selecting, presenting, and analyzing a Quote of the Day, the athlete touches a number of internal assets, such as: "Responsibility", "Honesty", and "Caring" to name only a few. This small assignment generates enthusiasm within our players and holds them accountable to themselves and their teammates to not only complete a task but to provide an honest assessment of the team.

Another important role of mine as a coach is to lead through positivity and encouragement, rather than negative reinforcement. Anyone who has participated in sport knows that athletics provides plentiful opportunities for failure. In my experience, both as a coach and player, athletes of all ages and abilities tend to focus predominantly on the negative, or what they were unable to accomplish. As a coach, it is my role to provide them with the guidance, vocabulary, and support to shift that focus to the positive. The popular refrain runs along the lines of "with each failure comes new opportunity". My role and goal as a coach is to enable my athletes to learn from perceived failure to a) avoid a similar outcome in the future and b) provide them with the internal assets necessary to overcome perceived failures in the future, both on and off the field, court, etc. If they are able to adopt this mindset, then the "failure" truly becomes perceived because they have turned it into an opportunity to better themselves, and, by extension, others. In the Millbrook Baseball program, I have turned a derivation of this idea into one pillar in the foundation of our program, our motto of "Always Getting Better".

Finally, returning to the macro perspective, my role as a coach in the development of life skills and assets in my athletes is to create an environment where they feel comfortable and able to take risks, grow as players and people, and enjoy the experience. Athletes who look forward to sport and participation in a team are far more likely to reap the benefits of participation than those who feel threatened or have negative associations with the experience. An athlete can most easily reap the benefits of team participation if they are supported by a coach who understands the true goal of that participation.