

The Positive Coach Mental Model

Mental models have power. They affect how people see, think, and behave. If one were to characterize the prominent mental model for coaching, it might be called "win-at-all-cost." PCA believes this needs to change.

As part of Positive Coaching Alliance's strategy to transform youth sports, we have developed the Positive Coach Mental Model and will promote it until it becomes the industry standard for youth sports. Extensive academic research constitutes the foundation for the Positive Coach Mental Model. Please read through the Positive Coach Mental Model [Research Summary](#) to learn more. The Positive Coach Mental Model is consistent with the National Standards for Athletic Coaches developed by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE).

The Double-Goal Coach PCA believes all youth sport coaches should be "Double-Goal" Coaches. A win-at-all-cost coach has only one goal: to win. He or she is concerned primarily with teaching skills and developing strategy designed to win games. A Positive Coach is a "Double-Goal Coach" who wants to win, *AND* has a second goal: to help players develop positive character traits, so they can be successful in life. Winning is important, but the second goal, helping players learn "life lessons," is more important. A Positive Coach puts players first.

Positive Coach Mental Model There are three major elements to the "job description" of a Positive Coach. A Positive Coach:

1. Redefines "Winner"
2. Fills Players' Emotional Tanks
3. Honors the Game

1. Redefines "Winner"

A Positive Coach helps players redefine what it means to be a winner through a mastery, rather than a scoreboard, orientation. He sees victory as a by-product of the pursuit of excellence. He focuses on effort rather than outcome and on learning rather than comparison to others. He recognizes that mistakes are an important and inevitable part of learning and fosters an environment in which players don't fear making mistakes. While not ignoring the teaching opportunities that mistakes present, he teaches players that a key to success is how one

responds to mistakes. He sets standards of continuous improvement for himself and his players. He encourages his players, whatever their level of ability, to strive to become the best players, and people, they can be. He teaches players that a winner is someone who makes maximum effort, continues to learn and improve, and doesn't let mistakes (or fear of mistakes) stop them.

2. Fills Players' Emotional Tanks

A Positive Coach is a positive motivator who refuses to motivate through fear, intimidation, or shame. She recognizes that every player has an "Emotional Tank" like the gas tank of a car. Just as a car with an empty gas tank can't go very far, a player with an empty emotional tank doesn't have the energy to do her best.

A Positive Coach understands that compliments, praise, and positive recognition fill Emotional Tanks. She understands the importance of giving truthful and specific feedback and resists the temptation to give praise that is not warranted. When correction is necessary, a Positive Coach communicates criticism to players in ways that don't undermine their sense of self-worth. A Positive Coach strives to achieve a 5:1 "Plus/Minus Ratio" of praise to correction.

A Positive Coach establishes order and maintains discipline in a positive manner. She listens to players and involves them in decisions that affect the team. She works to remain positive even when things aren't going well. She recognizes that it is often when things go wrong that a coach can have the most lasting impact and can teach the most important lessons. Even when facing adversity, she refuses to demean herself, her players, or the environment. She always treats athletes with respect, regardless of how well they perform.

3. Honors the Game

A Positive Coach feels an obligation to his sport. He understands that Honoring the Game means getting to the ROOTS of the matter, where ROOTS stands for respect for:

- **Rules**
- **Opponents**
- **Officials**
- **Teammates**
- **Self.**

A Positive Coach teaches his players to Honor the Game. He loves his sport and upholds the spirit, as well as the letter, of its rules. He

respects opponents, recognizing that a worthy opponent will push his athletes to do their best. He understands the important role that officials play and shows them respect, even when he disagrees with their calls. He encourages players to make a commitment to each other and to encourage one another on and off the field. He values the rich tradition of his sport and feels privileged to participate. A Positive Coach realizes that one of the most difficult times to Honor the Game is when the opponent is not, and he reminds his players to live up to their own highest standard (respect for self). Ultimately, a Positive Coach demonstrates integrity and would rather lose than win by dishonoring the game.

Positive Charting Directions

As coaches we tend to think that we add value by finding things that are done incorrectly and improving them. But it is equally important to find things that are being done correctly and to reinforce them. Positive Charting is a method for increasing the number of "right things" that your players do. It also creates a wonderful positive atmosphere in which players are more receptive to being corrected because they feel appreciated. Effective Positive Charting helps you reach the Magic 5:1 ratio, which best keeps players' Emotional Tanks full.

Here's how Positive Charting works:

1. Write the name of each player in a box on the **Positive Charting Form**. If there is a specific action you want to look for with that player (for example, hustling back on defense, blocking out for rebounds) write it in the space marked "Look-For."
2. Look for the positive things players do. Whenever you see one, jot a note under the player's name. (Over time you'll develop your own shorthand. The key is to write enough so you'll remember it when you get to step #5 below.) Remember to look for the team-building things that players do to encourage each other as well as their physical actions.
3. Make sure you have about the same number of comments (3-5 is good) for each player. You may have to look hard with some players. And you may have to limit the number of comments for the advanced players. Be disciplined: at the end of the game you should have 3-5 items for each player.

4. Be honest. Don't be tempted to make something up or write something that isn't true about any player. This is the hard part - you have to find something positive about each player. It may be a small thing, but you can find it if you look hard enough.
5. At your next practice, begin with a quick team meeting in which you review your positive charting with your team. Take each player in turn and share with the group the positives. This should take no more than 30 seconds or so per player. Enjoy the positive energy of your players during practice.

Coaches Scripts

ROOTS

I love the game of soccer, and I hope you do too. Soccer has a long history and is the most played sport in the world. A lot of great things happen on the soccer field. I feel that it is an honor to be involved in the sport. That's why I want to talk to you about Honoring the Game. Now, I am sure many of you have had parents or coaches talk to you about sportsmanship, or what it means to be a "good sport." What does it mean to you to be a good sport? (Answers may include "play fair," "don't cheat" etc.) Sportsmanship is important, but in order to get the most out of this soccer season, I want you to honor the game. We say that Honoring the Game goes to the ROOTS of the matter: R-O-O-T-S. Each letter in ROOTS stands for an important part of soccer that we must respect. The R stands for Rules. The first O is for Opponents. The next O is for Officials. T is for Teammates, and the S is for Self.

R is for Rules

The rules of soccer are what allow us to keep the game fair. Respect for the rules is important, even when it's possible to break them without getting caught. I want you to play by the rules, even if you think you won't get caught if you break them. Breaking the rules dishonors the game, even if it means that we win.

O is for Opponents

Without opponents, we could have no game. A good opponent makes us do our best. Sometimes your opponents are friends of yours. I want you to respect your opponents, and remember they are out there to have fun just like us. I want you to try your hardest to win, not because you hate your

opponent, but because you want to play your best. I promise that I will show respect for opposing coaches and teams, and I expect you to do the same.

O if for Officials

It is very important to respect officials. Often, this can be the most difficult part of Honoring the Game, so we need to remember to keep it as a focus when we play. Officials have been selected and trained to enforce rules, and they have a very hard job. Without the officials the game would be unsafe and unfair. Officials are not perfect (just like coaches, athletes and parents!) and sometimes make mistakes. However, there is no excuse for treating officials with disrespect when they make errors. I want you to show respect for officials, even when you disagree with the call. I promise to do the same thing.

T is for Teammates

A big part of soccer is the team. Being with your teammates should be fun. Later in life you will often be part of a team, and it is important to learn to work together. I hope you feel a commitment to each other as teammates and that you will agree to always play as hard as you can in practice and in games. Please encourage and support each other on and off the playing field.

S is for Self

Some people only Honor the Game when their opponents do, but I want us to Honor the Game no matter what the other team or its fans do. I want us to be the kind of team that Honors the Game even when others do not because we set our own personal standards. And we live up to them no matter what. We have respect for ourselves and would never do anything to dishonor the game.

So what do we mean when we say that Honoring the Game goes to the ROOTS of the matter? Respect for : Rules, Opponents, Officials, Teammates, and Self. If you do these five things, you are Honoring the Game. You and your teammates will get the most out of our season, and you will join the great tradition that is soccer. Now let's Honor the Game starting right now at this practice, especially when we scrimmage.

Who can give me an example of how we Honor the Game of soccer?

What does each letter stand for?

We say that the Tree of Mastery is an ELM tree because there are three things you need to do to climb the Tree of Mastery:

E is for Effort. We want to give our best effort every time we come out on the field. I am more concerned that we try our hardest than I am if we win. We could win against a weak team without giving it our best effort, and that doesn't really mean anything.

On the other hand we could play a team that was stronger than we are and try our very hardest and lose. I would be proud of us in that case because we were acting like a winner by trying our hardest even though the other team ended up winning the game.

So the first part of the ELM tree is E for Effort.

L is for Learning. We want to continue learning and improving every week in practice and every time we play a game. If we continue to learn, we will get better, and that is more important than whether or not we are better than some other team.

We could be better than another team without learning and improving if that team is a weak team. And we could be weaker than another team but be learning a lot and getting better all the time. It's more important to me that we learn and improve than it is to beat a team that isn't very good. And it's more important that we learn and improve even if we lose to a team that is stronger than we are.

So the second part of the ELM tree is L for Learning.

M is for Mistakes. Most people think it's bad to make a mistake. But mistakes are part of the learning process. You can't learn something as complicated as baseball if you are afraid to make a mistake. And people that are afraid to make a mistake often don't even try very hard.

I want you to know that it is okay to make a mistake on this team. We want to learn from our mistakes and not let them discourage us or keep us from working hard. So, is it okay to make a mistake on this team?

Yes, it is. And the third part of the ELM tree is M for it's okay to make a Mistake.

Acting like a winner involves three things. It means:

1. Giving your best effort every time,
2. Continuing to learn and improve, and
3. Not letting mistakes (or fear of making a mistake) stop you.

If you do these three things, you are acting like a winner, and you will be a winner in life as well as baseball.

Now let's go have a great practice. Give it your best effort, learn as much as you can, and don't worry about making a mistake.

Oh, before we go, what kind of a tree is the Tree of Mastery? What does each letter stand for?

Fill The Emotional Tank

Here is an example from a basketball coach's practice-

Have you ever heard of the home court advantage? How often do you think a team wins on its home court? It turns out that a team wins at home a lot more than when they are away. One reason for this is the emotional support of the fans. It tends to lift our emotions and make us play better.

We want to be able to play our best all of the time. To play our best we have to keep our "Emotional Tanks" full. What is an emotional tank? Well, it is like a gas tank in a car. When it is full, we run well, but when it is empty, we can't go very far.

Why is it important that we keep each other's tanks full? If our emotional tank is empty, we become negative, and we give up easier. If our tanks are full, however, we are optimistic and are able to handle difficult situations. As the coach, I will do my best to help fill your emotional tanks. To have a really great season, I need your help.

Think about when you miss a free throw. What would someone say to make you feel worse?"Nice job (sarcastically)," "You stink!" See, that was easy. We call that draining the emotional tank. When you criticize or insult your teammates, you make them feel worse. That's why we call it draining the emotional tank. I will try not to drain your emotional tank, but sometimes I

will have to correct you to help you learn the game. I will try to do this in a way that keeps your emotional tank full.

What would someone say to make you feel better after you missed a shot. ("Get the next one," "Shake it off!") We call that filling the emotional tank. Here are some ways to fill the emotional tank:

- Tell your teammate when you see him do something well, or when you see him giving his maximum effort, even if he does not make the play.
- Tell him when you see him improving. This will make him want to continue trying hard to improve even more.
- Listen to your teammates. If your teammate has an idea he wants to share, you can fill his tank by listening to what he has to say. No one wants to be ignored.

I promise to do all of these things. Also, I want you to do tank-filling activities with each other.

Here is a great way that you can help me. It is called the Buddy System. Once in a while at practice, I'll ask you to pair up with a buddy. It might be a different buddy every time. I want you to look for the things that your buddy is doing well. Remember, though, you have to be truthful, or else it won't mean anything. Also, try to tell your buddies exactly what they did right. If your buddy makes a nice pass, say "Good pass! Way to bounce it in to the low post."

Do you think it is important to say more positives than negatives? How many more positives should you say? I am going to try to shoot for five positives for every negative. I don't want you to worry about the exact number of positives you say, just remember, be as positive as you can.

So, right now, pair up with someone else, and he will be your buddy for today's practice. Later in the practice, I am going to have each one of you report back to the team on what your buddy said to you to fill your tank.

This season is going to be an especially great season if we support each other and keep our emotional tanks full. With full emotional tanks, we will be off to the races, and there is no limit to what we can accomplish.

Now, who can tell me some ways to fill each other's emotional tanks?