

How One Teammate Changes a Team

Six ways to be the teammate everyone wants on their team

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Your coach can’t be everywhere on the court at once. You can.

Hi, I’m Livia. I spent a month reading studies by scientists who wanted to know one thing: how much can one teammate change a whole team?

The answer is a lot. What you say, how you act and whether you believe in your team spreads to everyone around you. That works both ways. A confident teammate lifts the team up, and a grumpy one brings it down.

Here are six habits that make you the kind of teammate others look up to. Each one shows what it looks like at practice, in a game and at school or home.

Your goal this week

After you read this, try three things:

1. Remember that what you do helps decide how your whole team plays.
2. Think of one thing you could do better as a teammate.
3. Fill out a goal card on the last page, and work on your goal at practice this week.



1 Believe in your team out loud

Believing in your team is catching. When one player says “we can do this,” the whole team starts to believe it.

What scientists found

Scientists timed 144 soccer players doing a passing drill. Then a team leader told each team he felt sure about them, felt so-so, or had doubts. On the next try, teams with the confident leader were almost 23 seconds faster. Teams with the doubtful leader barely improved at all.

> **Remember:** *“If you believe in your team out loud, your team plays better. Scientists timed it.”*

At practice
Before a hard drill, say “We can do this one. We were close last time.”

In a game
Down six at halftime, tell the huddle “Two stops and two baskets and it’s tied.”

At school or home
Before your group presents a project in class, tell them “We know this stuff.”



2 Tell teammates what they do well

Players try harder when someone notices what they're good at. That someone can be you.

What scientists found

In another experiment, 120 basketball players about 15 years old ran a drill. Players whose teammate cheered on their skills cut 13 seconds off their time. Players without that teammate improved by only 1 second. A teammate's cheering made players want to try about as much as the coach's did.

> **Remember:** *"When a teammate does something well, tell them exactly what it was."*

At practice
Name the skill: "Your bounce passes are right on target today."

In a game
When a teammate misses a layup they usually make, say "You make that shot. Next one's going in."

At school or home
Tell a classmate exactly what you liked about their drawing or book report.



3 Watch what your body says

Your teammates read your face and shoulders before they hear a word. Your body sends a message even when you're quiet.

What scientists found

Players and coaches ranked 72 things that make a team feel more or less confident. Some of the worst were hogging the ball, moping, saying negative things and being mad when a teammate messes up. In another study, soccer players felt surer about their own penalty kick after seeing a teammate celebrate with arms up, and less sure after seeing a teammate hang their head.

> **Remember:** *"Your team is watching your face. Make it say 'we can do this.'"*

At practice
After you miss, jog back with your head up. Slumped shoulders tell everyone you've given up.

In a game
After a teammate's turnover, clap and point to them. Throwing your arms up tells the whole gym you're upset.

At school or home
When you lose a board game to your brother or sister, shake hands and ask for a rematch.



4 Pass kindness on

Kindness on a team spreads. The player who starts it sets the tone for everyone else.

What scientists found

100 hockey players ages 11 to 17 wrote in a diary every day. On days their teammates were kind to them, they were kinder back and felt closer to their team. Another study found that teenagers copy kind choices as easily as selfish ones, so whoever goes first sets the example.

> **Remember:** *"Be the first one to be kind. Others will follow."*

At practice
Help a teammate up off the floor, or rebound for someone shooting free throws.

In a game
Stand and cheer from the bench, and high-five every player coming off the court.

At school or home
Ask the new kid in class to sit with you at lunch.



5 Lead from wherever you are

You don’t need to be the captain, the oldest or the best scorer to lead. You just need to act like a leader.

What scientists found

Scientists asked 4,451 players and coaches who the real leaders on their teams were. 44% said the captain wasn’t the top leader in any of four leader jobs. Leaders came from all over the team. High school athletes in a captains course said the lessons they used were cheering on teammates and helping newer players.

> **Remember:** *“You don’t need to be the best player to be a leader.”*

At practice
Show a newer player where to stand on an inbounds play.

In a game
Talk on defense. Call out “Ball!” and “Switch!” so everyone knows where to be.

At school or home
Be the first one to start cleaning up after a class party, so others join in.



6 Make it safe to make mistakes

You learn faster on a team where messing up isn't a big deal.

What scientists found

Before a big game, college athletes who felt their teammates had their back were more confident, and stress hurt their confidence less. In a study of 51 work teams, people who felt safe admitting mistakes and asking questions learned more, and the teams that learned more did better.

> **Remember:** *"Mistakes are how you learn. Say 'my fault' and keep playing."*

At practice
Say "My fault" when you mess up. It shows everyone that mistakes are okay to own.

In a game
When a teammate misses a big shot and feels awful, sit next to them on the bench.

At school or home
Ask the question in class that you're worried sounds silly. Someone else wanted to ask it too.

My teammate goal

Pick one of the six habits. Write down one thing you'll do at practice this week to be a better teammate. Cut out your card and keep it in your bag.

My teammate goal

Name

The habit I picked

What I'll do at practice

My teammate goal

Name

The habit I picked

What I'll do at practice

My teammate goal

Name

The habit I picked

What I'll do at practice

My teammate goal

Name

The habit I picked

What I'll do at practice

The six habits: 1. Believe in your team out loud. 2. Tell teammates what they do well. 3. Watch what your body says. 4. Pass kindness on. 5. Lead from wherever you are. 6. Make it safe to make mistakes.

Where these facts come from

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