

# 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:

- **R**ules
- **O**pponents
- **O**fficials
- **T**eammates
- **S**elf.

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.