

Where are the Leaders?

I have noticed an alarming trend in sports over the last several years. The leaders have disappeared. I see it when watching both high school and college teams. Many of the teams with which I'm familiar seem leaderless, and their coaches are pulling their hair out.

For decades the world of sports has been an incubator for leadership skills, and both players and coaches have used it for training and development. That seemed rather natural for a long time, but no more. No longer do the strongest competitors and most powerful personalities become a team's leaders. Too often they simply blend into the background and defer leadership to the coaching staff.

I have given this a good deal of thought and prayer over the last few years and have reached one simple conclusion -- most competitors of this generation would rather be popular than be leaders. They sacrifice their influence and authority to lead on the altar of popularity and politeness. They rightly assume that leadership may require them to confront foolish behavior, to challenge their teammates to higher performance and to raise everyone's expectations. They believe these actions will lead to being less popular with their teammates and would hinder their social standing.

What they misunderstand is the true nature of leadership. To quote Chris Lowney's book, *Heroic Leadership*, "We're all leading and we're leading all the time. The question is whether we're doing it well or poorly." These players are leading, even without trying to, but they're doing it passively, by default and very poorly.

If you are a whole-hearted competitor, you are a leader already. Lead purposefully. Develop your leadership skills and determine to take the risks to lead strongly rather than to foolishly prefer popularity over wise service of your teammates. We who serve the players and coaches must help them choose to lead strongly rather than passively. Let's further challenge them to lead in a Christ-honoring manner.



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8701 Leeds Road | Kansas City, MO 64129 | 800.289.0909
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