

How To Be a Better Basketball Teammate

By [Vicki Olsen](#)

This may shock you, but I actually disagree with the old saying, "There is no I in TEAM."

There is an "I", and one player can really make or break a team's culture depending on how they use their qualities...

- Good teammates use their "I" in a positive way - so the team will improve.
- Selfish teammates focus their "I" on themselves - not allowing the team to run at its best because of negative energy.



Here are some tips that you can follow to be a better teammate...to give your team a chance to be the best it can be...

All you have to do is think **TEAMMATES**...

Talk - Verbally & Nonverbally

Verbal Language (the words that come out of your mouth)

A team needs to talk to each other on both ends of the court. You have to be each other's eyes...it shouldn't be quiet at all!

Half the time when something doesn't go right on the basketball court, it's usually because there was no communication, especially on defense.

- In transition defense, **communicate LOUD and EARLY** every single time! I mean every time you go down the court!! ("I got ball!! I have 21!! Who has 10?")
- On defense, **call out every screen!** ("Jimmy... screen left, screen left!" Then say, "Get through" or "Switch, switch")
- On defense, **yell "shot"** every time the ball goes up.
- On defense, if the player picks up the ball after dribbling... yell ("**The ball is dead.** It's dead.") This tells teammates that they can deny and look to steal the pass.
- **When you're on the sideline...**you can say the same things. ("Who has 21? Stop the ball!")
- **On offense, you can "call back" your coach's instruction** to make sure everyone hears it. For example, if the coach says "Run Inbounds Play 2", you can call it back by immediately holding your hand up (with two fingers) and saying, "Under the basket, run 2... run 2."

"A good practice is one where the players talk (on defense) and the coaches don't have to."

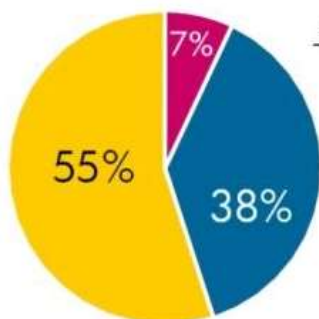
- Dr. James Gels, Coach's Clipboard

Nonverbal Language (facial expression, stance, eyes, etc.)

Your nonverbals - body language - are also a form of communication. What you do with your arms, how you stand or sit on the bench, your facial expression...they all send a message. Just make sure it's a positive message!

Rolling your eyes, mouthing swear words or other words bring your teammates down and can create some anxiety or uncomfortableness for others.

Stand and sit up straight, look people in the eye, nod, smile - those improve your team's atmosphere!



Dr. Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55% Rule

Elements of Personal Communication

- 7% spoken words
- 38% voice, tone
- 55% body language

Energy – Bring on the Positive!

Energy Givers have positive attitudes which trickle down to other players. They bring "life" to practice and games, putting everybody in a better mood.

Enthusiasm is contagious. There's nothing worse than a flat practice or game where nobody's excited.

During a game or practice, make sure you **cheer on teammates** (even from the bench) and give some high fives when celebrating!

And often the **new or inexperienced players need the most encouragement and support** from you.

You can boost these teammates' confidence by...

- Hanging out with the new player before practice or a game.
- Catching up with them outside of basketball.
- Helping them through drills and plays they're unfamiliar with.
- Giving them extra words of encouragement.

Let's face it... we're all humans and it's more enjoyable to have a little fun in life. Nobody wants to be around a person with a poor attitude. Don't be a Debbie Downer.

Bring positive energy - no matter the situation your team or you're in.



Attitude - Outlook is Everything

Be confident, not cocky. There's a difference. "I'm going to make my free throws in the game tonight" is much better than "I'm the GOAT in tonight's game. No one can touch me."

Have a **Growth Mindset** instead of a negative "fixed" mindset:

- If you consistently say things to yourself like, "I can't shoot free throws," rethink it...
- Add **YET** to the end helps: "I can't shoot free throws YET."
- This implies you know that you can improve by working at it.
- Don't be afraid of mistakes. Be afraid if you don't learn from your mistakes. Just try again...

Who cares if you screw up - Do better next time!

- The best players react in a positive way to mistakes and don't let them snowball into a bunch of mistakes, which obviously hurts the team.
- Tell yourself, "I'll do better next time!"
- Have a "**Next Play Mentality.**"

Your stats shouldn't be as important as the team's performance.

- Great teammates put their team first and do whatever it takes to help them be successful.
- If you score 20 points but your team loses by 10, stay humble. Don't brag about how many points you scored when your teammates are down because of the loss.
- Instead, you have to be the player who brings the team back up...getting them psyched for the next game. Make a plan and implement how you will all do better the next game!

*Good teams become great ones when the members trust each other enough to surrender the **ME** for the **WE**.*

- Phil Jackson

Mastery – Perfect Your Role

Everyone has different roles on the team. Figure out what you're good at and master that talent.

Or you can figure out what your team is missing and work to be the best at that.

Either way, you're helping your teammates out by knowing your role and working to become the most skilled version of you.

So, if you can be the best at least one thing on the team, your team will do better because there's an expert player doing the right things!

You don't have control of your height. But can you be the best communicator on the team?

Can you be the best defensive player?

Here are a few ideas for you to consider that will help your team:

- **Best rebounder**
- Best defender
- **Best shooting**
- Best playmaker
- **Best communicator on defense, offense, and on the sideline**
- Best finisher (driving and finishing at the basket)
- **Best post player**
- Best energy player (hustle, dive on floor, spring, and play harder than anyone else)



Max Effort - 100%... 100% of the Time

Lead by example - bring it every single day...no matter how you're feeling!

You'll inspire your teammates and set the bar high for them - they'll have no choice but to keep up, which makes everyone better.

Be a great practice player and challenge your teammates to make the team better. Here are some ways to put in 100% effort:

- **Sprint in transition!**
- Work your tail off on defense!
- **Get on the boards!**
- Hustle to every huddle or drill!
- **Perform every drill hard!**
- Dive on the floor for a loose basketball!
- **Sprint to your position on every pass!**
- Stay down in your defensive stance!

If you put all this effort into practice and games, you're sending the message that there's no slacking allowed!

"It takes no talent to hustle." - Hans Schmidt

A ttendance – Show to Grow

If you don't show up at your job, you'll be fired. If you don't show up for school, you'll get in trouble. Why should it be different for basketball?

Even if you're tired or have a ton of homework, **SHOW UP!**

Then your team always has enough people to practice well and prepare for opponents...and your presence sends the message that you put the team first.

- Get to practice early.
- Stay after practice and work on your goals.
- Try to have perfect attendance unless there's a legitimate reason not to go.



Source: PennToday

Toughness – Physically & Mentally

We already talked about how to be **physically tough** and why that makes a good teammate. Remember to...

- Do the dirty work. Dive for the ball, box out hard & crash the boards, sprint up & down the floor...you get it. You'd better be sweaty every practice!

But you also have to be mentally tough.

- Bad stuff happens...You miss open layups. You play perfect defense and they bank in a contested three. Refs are inconsistent.
- But you have to keep pressing forward for the team...Have that growth mindset of "next play mentality" - one possession at a time..
- Learn to shake it off and move on...or you'll bring the team down...and your chances of winning.

If you are hanging your head, how can you sprint back in transition, communicate, and put in great effort for the next play?

Mistakes are part of basketball. Think about these great players - and teammates:

- **Stephen Curry** - He's the best 3 point shooter in the world but misses more 3pt shots than he makes!!! He fails more than half of the time!
- **Lebron James** has turnovers and numerous missed shots every game.
- **Michael Jordan** has missed 26 game winning shots.
- **Luca Doncic** hit just 40% of free throws last year (that's less than half).

"I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

- Michael Jordan

See? Even the best players in the world make mistakes ALL THE TIME!!!

Do you see Stephen Curry pouting or hanging his head after missing shots? Of course not!

Does Luca Doncic stomp his feet and plop himself down on the bench after a free throw miss? No!

Basketball is a game of misses and mistakes...and you can control how you react to them.

Stay positive and send the right message to your teammates!

E~~x~~~~u~~~~s~~~~e~~~~s~~ - Get Rid of 'Em!

Like we said, great teammates may occasionally miss easy shots, dribble off their foot, commit turnovers, or miss a defensive assignment...

But they don't make excuses.

There is nothing wrong or "weak" about acknowledging your mistakes, taking responsibility, and ensuring the mistakes don't happen again.

A great teammate is always open to feedback. If a coach or teammate is offering you some constructive criticism, accept it and reflect on it. Pay attention to what they're saying and then apply it.

Don't pout or start with the excuses.

And if you need to say "Sorry" for something, that's good. But always take it to the next step and **FIX IT.**

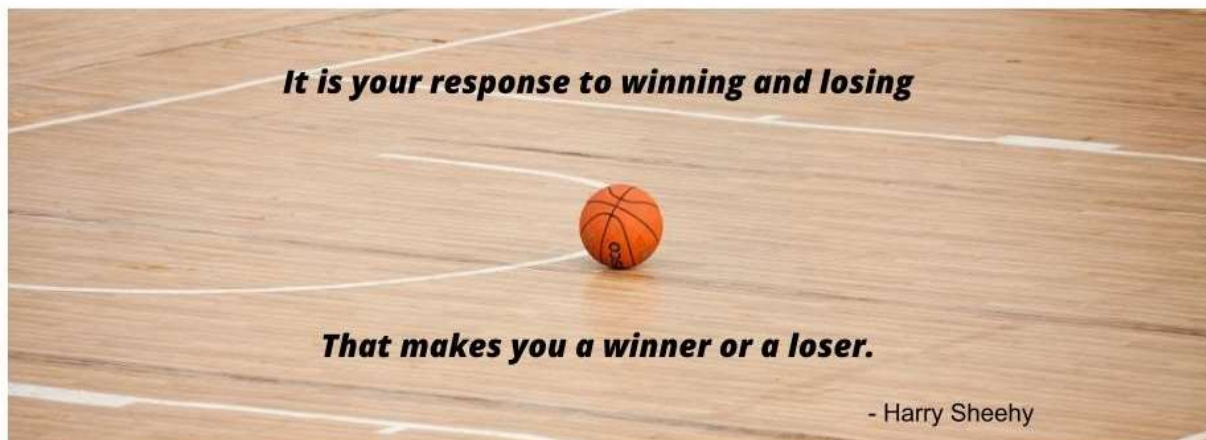
**It is better to
offer no excuse
than a bad one.**

- **George Washington**

Sportsman - A Respectful "Good Sport"

Here are some ways to show good sportsmanship (or "sports-woman-ship" - right, ladies?) that will help you be a positive role model for your teammates...

- **Help players off the floor and play hard-but-clean basketball** - teammates will know that they can count on you not to lose your cool and hurt your team in a negative way at an important time.
- **Shake the opposing coach's hand** and say, "Good game." Do the same to your coach. Even if you lost.
- **Use manners.** *Please, thank you, and you're welcome* go a long ways.
- **Talk nicely TO teammates, coaches, and opponents.** Be positive, kind, and supportive. Use teammates' names.
- **Talk nicely ABOUT teammates, coaches, and opponents,** even if you think they'll never hear what you said or read what you posted on social media.



And remember...you're not only setting a good example for teammates, but also for all those young players who idolize you, watching your every move from the stands...

Little Eyes Are Upon You

There are little eyes upon you,
And they're watching night and day;

There are little ears that quickly
Take in every word you say;

There are little hands all eager
To do anything you do;

And a little one who is dreaming
Of the day she'll be like you.

You are the little darling's idol,
You are the wisest of the wise.

In her mind about you,
No suspicions ever rise.

She believes in you devoutly,
Holds all you say and do;

She will say and do in your way
When she's grown up like you.

There's a wide eyed little one
Who believes you are always right;

And her ears are always open,
And she watches you day and night.

You are setting an example
Every day in all you do;

For the little one who's waiting
To grow up and be like you.

~Author Unknown

And below is a graphic to remind you how to be a great basketball teammate!

T = **T**alk

E = **E**nergy

A = **A**ttitude

M = **M**astery

M = **M**ax Effort

A = **A**ttendance

T = **T**oughness

E = ~~**E**xuses~~

S = **S**portsman