What is a Cohesive Team?

In the past, the concept of cohesion has been defined in many ways. In the sporting world, one definition is most widely used and accepted, and it is the one we will use. Cohesion is the total field of forces which act on members to remain in a particular group. People will usually refer to their team as cohesive if the members get along, are loyal and are united in the pursuit of its goals.

Merely being together at workouts and games doesn’t necessarily guarantee a team will be cohesive and successful, it simply means that they are occupying the same space at the same time. A cohesive team can be distinguished from a non-cohesive team by many characteristics.

A cohesive team has well-defined roles and group norms, common goals, a positive team identity, a good working relationship, shared responsibility, respect, positive energy, trust, a willingness to cooperate, unity, good communication, pride in membership, and synergy.

Another indicator of the amount of cohesiveness in a team is the frequency of statements of we and our, in contrast to statements of I, me and mine. The “we” is just as important as the “me”. Developing cohesion is something that takes time and effort, but it is well worth the investment.

Goals and Cohesion

To establish cohesion, everyone needs to be on the same page when it comes to team goals. If everyone is striving towards the same thing, this will help cohesion develop. Productivity must be established by setting challenging and specific goals. Making sure the members know what the individual goals are, for themselves and their teammates, is very important. If you know what your teammates are striving for, many times you can aid them in their endeavor, which will lead to a more cohesive relationship. There can be no hidden agendas by any of the members, their goals must coincide with team goals. What’s good for the team has to be good for the individual and visa versa.
The unspoken attitude is, “If it happens, that’s great, but if not, well, we don’t have a close group this year and there’s not much that can be done.”

The more cohesive a team is, the more it encourages peak performance in its members. If cohesion is lacking it can often prevent the team from reaching its’ potential. Shouldn’t teams spend time and energy developing a cohesive environment?

I think the problem is that many teams aren’t sure what cohesion is and how to go about developing and maintaining a cohesive environment. To often the unspoken attitude is, “If it happens, that’s great, but if not, well, we don’t have a close group this year and there’s not much that can be done.”

Establishing Team Cohesion

The 4 Steps of Cohesion

1. **Forming** is the act of putting the team together. In youth sports this may involve tryouts, a draft, or some other process of evaluating the athletes and placing them on teams. A critical part of this step is making the members feel comfortable with each other, getting to know each other, and beginning to establish lines of communication.

2. **Storming** is also referred to as infighting. It is not unusual to see displays of temper and occasionally even aggression during this stage. This is when the members of the team try to show off their skills for the coaching staff as they jockey for status on the team. It is during this stage that coaches assess the strengths and weaknesses of their athletes and begin to decide who will go in which roles: starters, substitutes, bit players, and so on.

3. **Norming** is the step in which the coaches pull the team back together. Within the team, we move from competition to cooperation. Each athlete must understand his or her unique role on the team and the contribution each will make to the team. In leagues with younger athletes, we may intentionally rotate the players among the various positions so they can experience the different skills involved in playing the sport.

4. **Performing** is the culmination of the team building process. It is when all the members work together to achieve the common team goals.

1. There should be mutual respect among members. You can’t have a cohesive group on the field if you don’t respect your teammates. You don’t have to necessarily love them off the field, but you better love them on the field and respect them both on and off the field. You are all fighting for a common goal and there is a special closeness that goes along with this.

2. There should be effective two-way communication that is clear and direct. Good communication skills result in an increase in self-esteem, respect, trust, and decision making skills.

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3. There also needs to be a feeling of importance on the team. You should do your best to make each member feel like they are a part of the team and contribute something important. Know the needs of your athletes and how you can help make them feel like they are a viable part of the team.

4. Having continuity in practices, and in every part of the team, can contribute to the cohesiveness of the team. Familiarity breeds not only confidence but also a sense of comfort among the team.