

## How to Assess Team Culture: A Guide for Coaches Who Want More Effective Teams

As a coach, one of the most challenging skills in the youth sport world today is to learn how to evaluate the effectiveness of your team culture. How do you objectively diagnosis the culture of the team and connect that to an action plan that gives you clarity around what you want to continue, start, or stop doing as a coach? Aside from the team's record, what are the signs of a healthy team culture? There are complicated questions, and if you are like most athletic coaches, you primarily rely on a "sixth sense" for gauging your team's culture based on your years of experience and your intuition.

To build on that sixth sense, [TrueSport Expert](#) Roberta Kraus, PhD, the President of the Center for Sports Psychology – Colorado Springs, Colorado, recommends the following coaching assessment tool, which not only offers a method for diagnosing team culture, but gives coaches the opportunity to put a premium on transparency that demonstrates they stand for something beyond the win/loss record. It also provides a clear pathway for open discussion about what coaches and athletes want to continue, start, or stop doing in the program.

### What should coaches diagnose?

Imagine your team in the competitive arena. As you observe the athletes in action, reflect on the way the team interacts and consider the questions below. It is most effective when coaches use a rating scale for answers and ask for anonymous feedback from athletes, other coaches, and (if appropriate) parents.

Suggested rating scale:

- 1 = This is an issue for us all the time.
- 2 = This is an issue for us most of the time (but not all the time).
- 3 = Half the time this is an issue and half the time this is not an issue for us.
- 4 = This is rarely an issue for us (only some of the time).
- 5 = This is not an issue for us at any time (not at all).

Questions:

1. *Does the team seem to be putting forth sufficient **effort**?*

Effort is something you can see. Are all the team members engaged in the training? Are they energetic? Are there moments when the energy drops off? Why? Are some working harder than others or is one athlete lagging? How hard are team members working both at practice and in competition?

2. *Does the team have the requisite **skill and ability** to compete at this level?*

Skill and ability are things you can hear and see. Does the team seem to possess the skill and ability needed to be competitive at the right level? Are the unique skills each team member

brings to the table complimentary? Are team members sharing experiences and lessons with each other? Are there shared gaps in team member skills and abilities where learning can occur?

3. *Does the **coaching strategy** (i.e., coaching plan/execution) seem effective for the team's skill level and the competitive arena they are a part of?*

Coaching strategy is something that you can smell (like smoke before a fire) and anticipate. If the team pursues its goals with its current coaching plan of action, will it achieve the desired results at the end of competitive season? Are the goals understood and accepted by all athletes on the team? Is the coaching strategy clear to everyone? Do the athletes support their coaches' plan? Are they motivated by their coach to pursue the training? Are the coach and/or coaching staff the right fit for the athletes they have in their program?

4. *Does the team exhibit signs of healthy **group dynamics**?*

Group dynamic is something you can feel. How well are team members getting along with each other? How are they speaking and listening to each other? Are they expressing their feelings towards each other? Is there unresolved conflict among team members? Do team members spend time together outside of practice? Are the members competitive with one another in a healthy manner? Are there flexible, appropriate, and shared leadership roles that team members aspire to? Are relationships between coaches and athletes effective? Is there devoted time for feedback sharing between athletes and coaches?

### **What does it mean?**

If you end up with all 5s, then congratulations! You should reflect on the good work that has gotten the team culture to this healthy level of performance and identify the behaviors you want everyone to continue doing. If you are like most coaches, you probably didn't end up with a perfect score, which suggests that your team may have some team culture opportunities to tackle.

### **When should this diagnosis happen?**

Diagnosis should be something that happens the moment athletes come together for the first time, and it should continue until the moment the season ends or the team disbands. Why? Firstly, because constant diagnosis will allow for slight shifts and replace the need for drastic changes. And second, this ongoing evaluation allows coaches to uncover both positive and negative lessons that will inform their approach.

### **Takeaway**

Monitoring team culture is a critical responsibility for a coach, and these four key factors (effort, skill and ability, coaching strategy, and group dynamics) form the cornerstone of a healthy team culture. Coaches can use this assessment for themselves, their coaching staff, their athletes, and the parents to continually and methodically evaluate team culture over the course of each season.



### *About TrueSport*

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<https://truesport.org/teamwork/team-culture-guide-coaches/>