

How to Build the Ultimate Color Guard – Part 2

By Chris Casteel

Happy July! Ah yes, the wonderful month of July! Even though we are months away from competitive season, you should be beginning to see glimpses of the ‘guard to be’ in your summer rehearsals. Those sparks of performance as the new team finds its way toward identity and distinction. How exciting!

Last month I wrote about Vision, Commitment and Trust in the quest to build the ultimate color guard. All three of these components are equally valuable as you build your programs over the summer months and throughout the coming school year. This month, however, the focus is going to be switched a bit from the instructor’s contribution to the student leadership component of a color guard.

I would guess that most instructors that have been in this activity for any length of time would agree that student leadership can either be incredibly valuable to the instructor and team alike, or (on the other side of the spectrum) a bit of a management challenge. I can tell far too many stories about student leaders that I ‘*knew*’ would be phenomenal. However, once they earned the title, they unfortunately turned into something quite the opposite. Yet, there have also been individuals in which I had some concerns about at the beginning of the year. Thankfully, these individuals turned out to be the type of leader we all dream about. When I look back to the specific years that I would deem as ‘successful’, they are the years when the student leadership was the strongest. Whatever the case, quality student leadership is such a huge component of building your team that it has landed itself in this series of how to build the ultimate color guard.

When building a color guard, the first thing to realize is that success does not rest solely upon the shoulders of the instructor. In student leadership a myriad of components come into play that the instructor could never assimilate on his/her own. A leader’s job is so much more than being helping hands of the instructor. Actually, their value is to provide peer mentoring, inspiration, and example to the guard membership. A good leader will create aspirations within the younger members to commit as they have, persevere via their strong example, and someday fill their shoes as a leader of the team. It is this natural attrition that all good organizations possess. The young members view themselves as having the potential to someday be in a leadership position within the guard.

Below is a laundry list of ideal characteristic and attributes that I have found to be highly valuable when grooming student leaders.

Leadership Behavior:

Cooperation and conflict resolution

Teamwork

Keeping themselves and others motivated

The ability to get along in a group of diverse individuals and create connections within that group.

Competence:

Knowledge, Skills and Experience

Organization and management abilities

Technical ability

Communication:

The ability to use timely, specific and clear feedback

Listen to others always

Have the courage to state thoughts and feelings with sensitivity

The ability to place themselves into other peoples shoes during conflicts

Judgment and Decision-Making:

Situationally appropriate decision-making

The use of their experience in the activity to develop good judgment

Utilizing the strengths and knowledge of other team members to solve problems

Tolerance for Adversity and Uncertainty:

Learning to endure (maybe even enjoy) hard work and challenge

The ability to adapt to changes and unknowns (there are a lot of those in CG!)

Turning challenging situations into opportunities for the team

Utilize humor to keep things in perspective

Self Awareness:

Knowing/Accepting their personal strengths and weaknesses

Learning from experience

Being aware of Leadership Style (<http://psychology.about.com/od/leadership/a/leadstyles.htm>) and how they influence others

Realization that their words and actions completely impact the team

Vision and Action:

The ability to see possibilities in any situation and finding creative and positive ways to move the team forward.

Motivational and the ability to initiate positive reactions

Whew! There are a lot, I realize! To be honest, I don't know if there is a person out there who possesses all these characteristics. It is a bit of a wish list, I would have to say. However, there are some that come close. The important thing that I hope you get from this is that there are also student leaders that don't have half the attributes on the list. This is not to be a discouragement in any way to you as the instructor or the student leader. In fact, if one has a desire to do anything well, then I believe they have the power within them to achieve it. Perhaps just an understanding of some of the components on this list will help them to grow and learn. That is what we are all about, changing lives, changing people for the better and celebrating our unique activity. So, go out and build those student leaders into all you need them to be. They really are a huge part of building your program into the ultimate color guard.

