

So you want to be an assistant coach?

I talked to a good friend of mine on the phone today. He is a former NCAA Div. I Head Coach and is now taking a NCAA Div. I Assistant Coach position. We got into a discussion about the qualities that make a good Assistant Coach. Here are some of the things we came up with. By no means is this a complete list.... but it is a good start.

1. Loyalty. This is number one on every list I have ever seen. Head coaches want assistants who are loyal to them and the program. Head coaches are often under scrutiny from fans, media, administrators, and they need to have an inner circle of confidants who they can trust completely. Good assistants may disagree with the head coach in private but they must remain loyal to the Head Coach in public. Loyalty does not mean being a "YES" person. In fact "Yes" people do not make good assistants because they do not help to improve your program. If assistant coaches never challenge the Head Coach how can the program grow? "People who say yes to you all the time are, in my opinion, insulting you. They assume you are either too immature or unstable or egotistical to handle the truth," says Tennessee Women's Basketball Coach Pat Summit.

2. People/Communication skills. Head coaches want assistants who have great people skills. Assistants are often the link between the Head Coach and the athletes. It is crucial for assistants to have great listening and communication skills to handle this role effectively. At the university level good people skills are absolutely vital in the recruiting process as well as dealing with the media, fans and parents. Building good relationships is a key to being a good coach.

3. Relentless work ethic. Doesn't everyone want to be surrounded by hard working people? I would think every head coach would like an assistant who is willingly to put in the hard work and long hours necessary to build and maintain a successful program. Good assistants should be as committed and dedicated to the program as the head coach is.

4. Responsible and ethical. Assistant coaches need to have personal accountability. They need to be able to work without constant guidance and supervision. Head coaches need to be surrounded by assistant coaches that make moral, ethical and rational decisions and are therefore answerable for their own behavior. The Head Coach will have to discipline athletes; they certainly do not need to be disciplining their Assistant Coaches too.

5. Enthusiastic and Energized. Tom Crean, the new Indiana University Men's Head Coach says, "Only the Head Coach has the opportunity to bring negative energy. The rest of the staff must bring positive energy". Head coaches want assistants who bring passion, energy and excitement to the program. It is important for assistant coaches to be positive and optimistic.

Head coaches can get discouraged when things are not going well, assistant coaches can help by staying positive.

6. Initiative. Assistant coaches need to take initiative to get things done and not wait for the Head Coach to tell them what needs to be done. Coming up with new ideas, looking at things differently and being a step ahead are important qualities for an assistant coach to have.

7. Knowledge of Game. Every assistant coach should be a student of the game. It is important to be a lifelong learner, whether you are a head coach or an assistant coach. A good assistant coach should be thirsty to learn, develop and grow. They need to have a solid knowledge of the game so that they can assist the head coach with game plans, scouting, skill development, video break down, practice planning etc.

8. On court teacher. Assistant coaches need to be able to get on the court and teach the game. It is one thing to know the game, or to have played the game; it is something completely different to be able to teach the game. Knowing how to teach is a very desirable quality in an assistant coach.

9. Compatible core values. If the head coach and the assistant coach have a completely different set of core values the relationship will never work.

10. Loves coaching for all the right reasons. What is the right reason for coaching? The athletes. Helping them to become the best they can be as people and as players. As I look back and read over this list I realize the 10 qualities that make a good assistant coach are qualities that make a good assistant in any profession.

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