

Improve Your Ability to Recruit and Retain Quality Coaches

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by Positive Coaching Alliance

Becoming the kind of organization that people want to be affiliated with is the key to effective coach recruitment and retention.

Part 1: The organizational characteristics

If leaders of an ice arena or youth sports organization (YSO) program are to establish a standard of quality coaching, the YSO program must have enough coaches so it does not have to use or hire just anyone to fill in as a coach.

The Ice Skating Institute and Positive Coaching Alliance believe youth sports programs that aspire to be outstanding educational-athletic organizations need to retain more coaches than they will ultimately need. We recommend setting a goal of 110 percent of the coaches you expect to need. This provides leaders with the power to set and enforce Positive Coaching standards, and in a few cases, to inform coaches when they no longer meet (as a result of their behavior) the rink's coaching criteria.

Many YSO leaders are fearful to ask “too much” of their coaches. They are concerned that establishing high standards or certain criteria (e.g., attending mandatory coach training) may cause a mass exodus, resulting in a shortage of coaches at the start of the season.

What is it that makes some programs attractive to coaches? Here are a few common factors.

1. The activity is enjoyable.
2. The people are fun to be around.
3. They believe in the mission or cause.
4. It provides them with a chance to get/stay physically fit.
5. It is a chance to make a difference in their community.

YSOs that give coaches more of these opportunities will be able to attract as many as they need.

Part 2: The recruitment campaign

Now that we know what it takes to develop an organization that people want to be affiliated with, how does a program implement an effective coach recruitment campaign? Here are some key steps.

1. Appoint a coach recruitment manager: This person ideally will be an outgoing, sales-oriented individual who is not bashful about selling the attributes of the rink or program and, most important, is determined and persistent.
2. Develop your message: Using the ideas from Part 1, craft the message to use in your campaign. The general idea, especially if your program advocates the principles of Positive Coaching, is: “This is not just another skating or hockey program. On the contrary, we provide every coach with the training and support necessary to develop exceptional learning environments for the athletes we

serve, and to help every skater or hockey player develop positive character on and off the ice.”

3. Advertise: Research the options for getting the word out in your area. Newspapers, parent media, schools and radio public service announcements (PSAs) are potential targets. (NOTE: The ISI EDGE magazine offers free classified ads to ISI members.)
4. Start early: Get recruiting notices out three to four months before the season.
5. Follow-up: After the notices are sent to the local media and other networks, follow up with phone calls and e-mails.
6. Keep it up: Remember the advertising truism, “They have to hear the jingle seven times before they buy the toothpaste.” Resubmit flyers and notices every week until you have the coaches you need.
7. “Open house” sessions: Consider holding one or more informational sessions for prospective coaches. This can be a hook for your media notices and a way for individuals to check out your ice arena or program.
8. Target high-potential areas: Focus on local institutions where potential coaches congregate. Local colleges are filled with undergraduates who competed in high school and love the sport, but are not currently competing. High school athletes might also be great candidates for assistant coaches.
9. Coaches as recruiters: Enlist your “best” coaches to recruit others in their network.
10. Seek out mothers (not just fathers) to coach: Many women have an intuitive understanding of the elements of Positive Coaching but may not know enough about the technical aspects of hockey or figure skating. By offering clinics and giving the option of starting as an assistant coach, you may be able to tap into a much larger pool of potential coaches.
11. Evaluate: At the end of the season, gather a representative group of your coaches and ask how the season went, what they appreciated, what could be improved and what ideas they have for getting more coaches. Solicit testimonials from coaches that can be used in next season’s collateral.

ISI and PCA wish you continued success in recruiting quality staff and coaches!

To learn more about how the ISI-PCA national partnership benefits your skating community, contact PCA at (866) 725-0024 or PCA@PositiveCoach.org, or visit PositiveCoach.org.