

What Is Your Rink Known For?

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By Kathy Toon

Good or bad, every rink is known for something. Every rink - in fact, every organization - has a culture. At Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) we define culture very simply as "the way WE do things HERE." Unfortunately, most organizational cultures are haphazard and sloppy, and don't contribute to the accomplishment of the organization's mission. Perhaps the most important job of a leader is to be a Culture-Shaper. Effective leaders are thoughtful about the culture of their organization, and they intentionally create and manage that culture.

If you want to develop a strong organizational culture that helps every member (employees, skaters, parents, coaches) have the best experience possible, you need to be proactive about creating and maintaining the culture, so those involved reinforce it rather than undercut it. With youth sports, if you don't intentionally create a culture of Positive Coaching, what you will most likely have is a "win-at-all-cost" culture because that is what your parents, coaches - and to some degree players - bring with them. They have been watching professional sports on TV and they have win-at-all-cost on the brain. Unless you intentionally create a different culture, one that puts Positive Coaching and Honoring the Game in the forefront, you are going to get a win-at-all-cost culture because that's what's in the larger society.

In his recent book, *The Double-Goal Coach*, PCA founder and executive director Jim Thompson addresses five elements of effective team and organizational culture. These include: explicit and congruent values; procedures and rituals; shared vocabulary; open, two-way communication; and a feeling of "family." I'd like to highlight one area - shared vocabulary.

Humans are verbal creatures. Developing a vocabulary that reflects and reinforces the organization's values helps to create the feeling of being in a special organization. A shared vocabulary shapes the way an organization thinks of itself. A "signature statement," or "what we want to be known for" as an organization, is a powerful tool for shaping a group's sense of itself. A rink's signature statement or slogan should reflect its mission statement. Does your rink have a formal mission statement? If not, we highly encourage you to develop one.

Signature statements need to be communicated. A key lesson we've learned at PCA is "message bombardment" - advertising folks do not assume hearing their jingle once is enough. Often during sporting events you may see the same commercial three times within a 15-minute span. Advertisers do not care if you say "I just saw this commercial." They want to bombard you with their message or slogan (e.g. "Can you hear me now?" or Just Do It). Great organizations do the same thing to build their team culture - they repeat their signature statement over and over again. Your staff, coaches, parents and athletes need to hear and see your message constantly. They also need exposure to it through multiple channels - spoken, written and visual.

Look around your rink. How often do you see messages or images that reflect what you want to be known for? Is your mission statement visible to everyone who walks through your door? Is it featured prominently on your Web site? What are the explicit and/or implicit messages delivered by the posters and signs adorning the walls? What about the clothing worn by your staff? What do folks hear when they call you rink? What about when they are on hold? Do you include an e-mail signature message? Does your newsletter reinforce your mission and signature statement?

Finally, culture is about action: "The way we do things here." Thus, developing procedures and

rituals that reinforce the values that you want your members to internalize is an important culture-building tool. The way leaders set up each of these items has a direct impact on organizational culture. What is it that you actually do within your rink? How does your signature statement show up in action? Is it reflected in your policies and procedures? The bottom line is do you "walk your talk" as an organization? Do you put your values into action on a daily basis? The extent to which an organization's actions match its mission is a key to its ability to become a special organization.

To learn more about how the ISI-PCA Partnership can help your arena develop a stronger team and organizational culture, contact PCA at (866) 725-0024 or visit www.PositiveCoach.org.

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