

# THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

# research

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THE MOST TRUSTED SOURCE ON BECOMING A BETTER LEADER

<b>TITLE</b>	Leadership Development of Team Captains in Collegiate Varsity Athletics
<b>RESEARCHER</b>	Christian Grandzol, Susan Perlis, Barbara Sadowski, and Lois Draina Journal of College Student Development 2010, Vol. 51, No. 4, pp. 403-418
<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	The purpose of the study was to determine if participation in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III athletics as a team captain or student athlete was associated with leadership development.
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	Twelve Athletics Directors from member institutions in one Commonwealth of Pennsylvania athletic conference offering NCAA Division III fall varsity sports were mailed a description of the study and an invitation to participate. These institutions were classified as small, private, not-for-profit, 4-year institutions with primarily or highly residential, majority undergraduate student populations. Approval was granted by six institutions and 15 coaches distributed copies of the student version of the Leadership Practices Inventory (self) to their players. The selected NCAA-sponsored sports in this study were men's and women's soccer, women's field hockey, men's and women's cross country, and women's tennis. No formal leadership training was offered for any of the student athletes on these campuses. A total of 160 useable surveys were returned (response rate 74%). Females outnumbered males (65% vs. 35%), no students were over 24 years of age, freshmen comprised almost half of the sample, team captains were mostly juniors and

seniors and 89 percent of the respondents were Caucasian. Eighty-one percent of the sample were team members (N=129). Participants completed the pretest during their preseason week and the posttest during the last week of the season. This time frame was 10 to 12 weeks depending upon the individual sport.

## KEY FINDINGS

Posttest scores on the LPI were all higher than those reported on the pretest (end of the season versus start of the season). The two most frequent leadership practices at the pretest and posttest administrations were Encourage and Enable and Challenge was the least frequent leadership practice at both time periods. Means of team captains were greater than means of team members for both the pretests and posttests across all five leadership practices. It is apparent that means of team captains increased from pretest to posttest while the means of team members remained essentially the same from pretest to posttest. Inspire a Shared Vision was an exception to this pattern with both groups showing a significantly change over the course of the season.

ANOVA showed that team captains' scores were significantly higher than team members' scores on average at the end of the season. This suggests that it was not participation in athletics alone that encouraged development of the leadership practices of Model, Challenge, Enable and Encourage; rather, it was participation in athletics as a team captain.

Post hoc analysis for gender and year in school revealed few differences, which is consistent with previous studies. Females scored higher on Enable at pretest and higher on Encourage at posttest than males. All other pretests

and posttests by gender were not significant, which “largely indicates that gender was not a factor affecting leadership practices for the sample” (p. 414). No significant differences were found on any of the pretest or posttest means on the leadership practices by year in school. “This finding provides increased evidence that it was the team captain experience, not class status, which was the source of difference on the leadership practices” (p. 414).

The authors point out that:

Team captains demonstrated higher levels of all five leadership practices than team members. This finding is consistent with expectations that team captains should provide greater leadership. It seems that choice of team captain may be based on the captains’ perceived leadership abilities and not their year in school, athletics success, popularity, etc., as could be argued (p. 414).

Evidence was found that the team captain experience provides students with opportunities to improve their leadership abilities. Team captains significantly increased scores for all five leadership practices between the pretests and the posttests probably because they were presented with challenges and opportunities that encouraged, or perhaps required, them to develop leadership skills. Even though team captains in the study were not formally trained in the leadership practices, the experience itself likely fostered the change in scores (pp. 414-415).

Limited evidence was found that athletics participation itself, at least over the course of one playing season, encouraged leadership development for student-athletes in the sample. Team members significantly increased their scores only for Inspire a Shared Vision. The inference is that athletics

participation alone is not sufficient to spur substantive leadership growth during one playing season for the average student-athlete” (p. 415).

The results should encourage institutions to initiate leadership development in the context of athletics, extend it to other areas of student participation, and provide experiences that promote development.... The NCAA could utilize the results to document opportunities for student leadership development in athletics (p. 415).