



Understanding the Shifting Roles of a Mentor

In order for athlete leaders to prepare for and undertake meaningful positions of influence and leadership on and off the playing field, it is imperative that they have a partner in their quest to become the best athlete leader they can be. That partner is a mentor.

The dictionary defines mentor as:

- Someone wise and trusted; counselor; supporter; advisor; guide
- Coach; teacher; tutor; instructor; trainer
- Someone who gives help and advice over a period of time to help a person learn a role
- Giving specialized training and coaching in a particular subject or an event

For our prospective and newly recruited athlete leaders, a mentor opens the door to new horizons for that athlete that neither s/he the mentor nor family may have ever imagined.

For the mentor to take on the role of wise and sage advisor, s/he must want to take on the responsibility of self-education of the mission, goals and philosophy of Special Olympics in addition to the purpose, goal and basic concepts of athlete leadership. The mentor journeys with the athlete through observations, experiences, the Athlete Leadership Training Series/ALPs University coursework, and practical application of leadership skills. Together, they experience the evolution of an athlete leader.

Building leadership skills is a partnership between an athlete and a mentor and one of the most rewarding experiences ever! Being a mentor is much like being a sports coach. The coach starts with the skill level of the athlete and assists the athlete in building skill upon skill using a variety of strategies to do so. Mentors are also being ever mindful of the athlete leaders' interests and passions so they may help them find their niche in ALPs. A mentor, like a sports coach, teaches, instructs and tutors up to a point. When it is time for the athlete to run the race, serve the ball, or make a pitch, it is up to the athlete to do it by him/herself.

As new challenges or skills sets are introduced to an athlete, the mentor modifies his/her level of influence as needed. There is no magic time frame for an athlete's acquisition of knowledge, self-exploration and leadership skills. Every athlete is different in their rate of learning and development of their skills and self-confidence.

Roles of Mentors

Mentors' roles are multi-dimensional and may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Finds short-term mentor(s) to assist with athlete's desired new role if mentor's skill-sets do not meet the athlete's need at that time such as becoming a coach or an official
- Moves between helper, speech coach, facilitator, advisor, confidant, teacher and friend as needed
- Works one-on-one during each course and monitors follow up tasks
- Ensures there are adequate opportunities to provide practicum experiences
- Commits to a partnership in making the ALPs experiences as meaningful as possible
- Is an advocate at all times
- Ensures athlete knows about training opportunities inside and outside Special Olympics

Questions on becoming a mentor? Contact alps@sone.org