It is this stress that has especially weakened many coaches' effectiveness. Every week of any typical season, coaches can experience tension caused by conflicts with unfocused wrestlers and antagonistic parents. Even a coach's own competitive attitude can lead to anxiety as he pushes himself to win matches. In this kind of domain, disagreements are common, and confrontations are frequent. If they are not handled effectively, failure is more common than success.

When coaches fail to manage these situations properly, they exhibit symptoms associated with poor leadership: Doubt, anger, frustration, negativity, regrets, even poor health. They leave conflicts unresolved and sometimes over-react to challenges. If they can eliminate their own self-destructive behaviors and emotional surges, however, they can become successful, winning coaches.

A variety of factors have changed the coaching profession. Advancements in technology, the unstable character or performance of athletes, and the aggressive presence of the media have all contributed to transforming the coaching profession. "These forces are pulling the modern head coach in directions different in both scope and intensity than coaches of earlier generations," says Walton.

Winning coaches aren't dismayed or discouraged by the problems cited by Walton and others. They rely on their perseverance, patience, and diligence to deal with these issues and their wrestling teams. Wrestlers truly have changed, and the more successful coaches have changed with them.

Designing achievement begins with you, the coach. You have to be hard working and set a solid example. You can be friendly with your wrestlers, but they have to know that you will not let them take short-cuts. When athletes discover that you are dedicated toward their success and have an organized plan for the season, achievement is likely to happen. This type of commitment on your part most often prompts wrestlers to be loyal to you and your program and make winning happen.

Strategies for All Season

Obviously coaching today is more than following a practice plan attached to a clipboard and distributing varsity letters at the end of the season. More is expected of coaches today than ever before by administrators, parents, and athletes, and coaches too often have to work in an environment that may hinder instead of promote success. They may struggle with the disappointment associated with failing to win matches and to accomplish goals. Maybe they will confront a low salary given by the school board and poor behavior exhibited by their wrestlers. They may leave practice exhausted, maybe even injured.

Whether you expect problems like this to diminish or worsen in the coming year, they are part of the climate that surrounds a wrestling coach. The coach's eyes must be opened wide to function in this domain which is inherently based on conflict. You must be a special person who is prepared to address issues related to behavior, injury, personalities, and strategy while trying to produce competitive teams. Overall, wrestlers today are more talented and experienced, and their interest in winning matches is as strong as it ever was, but keep in mind that they are also working in the same difficult environment you are.

Coaching has little to do with what you wear and a lot to do with how you act and what you say. It is how your wrestlers know you and how they act when they're around you. If you focus your efforts on building positive relationships with your wrestlers, their parents, school administrators, fellow coaches, league opponents, and support personnel, team and individual success surely follows. Indeed, when the entire coaching staff concerns themselves with developing successful relationships, team achievement and personal accomplishment are maximized. This happens because a supportive, goal-oriented network has been established where everyone involved in the program seeks to benefit someone else.

"Coaching has little to do with what you wear and a lot to do with how you act and what you say".

Creating these kind of relationships depends on knowing first the interests, experiences, and skills of your wrestlers. Why did they join wrestling? In what other clubs or sports are they involved? What are their special talents? Discover the background of each wrestler and build on it. Learn the names of your wrestlers' parents, the parents' occupations, brothers and sisters; maybe even how they all spent their summer vacations. When you take an active interest in each wrestler's family, that family takes an active interest in your program. Talk to parents after matches, during the "down" times at tournaments, or at another sporting event. As you use those brief opportunities to befriend them, allow them to get to know you.

Furthermore, you have to form relationships with your colleagues and administrators. Be sure they know your concern for the wrestlers' academics and behavior in school. Invite them to the competitions (offer free tickets if you have to) and solicit their advice on dealing with certain kids in the program. In short, involve them by teaching them how they can make a positive contribution to the wrestling program.

The head coach must be the catalyst for this relationship-building process. He must be very attentive to encouraging first his own staff, then the wrestlers, parents, administrators, and other personnel to adopt the goals important to the program. Everyone directly involved with the program must accept the validity and value of the team's objectives. This takes, to be sure, much time and effort (sometimes almost an entire season), but the ultimate reward is the faith all these individuals have in the coach and his program.

You must lead by example during the season. Your commitment, attitude, and effort establish the model assistant coaches and wrestlers should follow. This is an awesome task. A varsity wrestler at University (HI) High School says, "An effective coach is someone who knows the game and the competition like the back of his hand. He has to be able to devote his time into coaching and making the team better both in-season and off-season. He has to push athletes to strive to be better and never give up."