



Growing Champions *for Life*

How to Differentiate Yourself at the Gym and Solve Multiple Problems By David Benzel

Directing a gym means being faced with multiple challenges simultaneously. For many gym administrators it's the issues coming from parents and coaches that drain energy and time from the challenge of running a quality program for the kids. It's ironic, but true!



One of the golden moments in administrating a program is when you find a single strategy that solves multiple issues at the same time. These "silver bullets"

are rare but extremely valuable because of the opportunity to leverage the benefits across a variety of tribulations. In addition, you look like a genius in the process – something every sport leader deserves from time to time!

One of the most powerful and untapped silver bullet strategies is in parent education. Consider these factors. Under-informed and miss-informed parents cost you revenue when they:

- Miss-judge your philosophy or the culture you're trying to create;
 - Make assumptions about coaching strategies and undermine coaching decisions;
 - Criticize your program in front of potential members;
 - Spread false information among members;
 - Place performance pressures on their children
 - Do not understand how to play their role as sport-parent effectively;

Every one of these scenarios undermines the credibility of your program and can lead to losing members, losing revenue, and deterioration of your brand/reputation. Parents are the most under-coached stakeholders in youth sports.

In spite of the fact that parents have good intentions for their child's experience at your gym they can inadvertently become the biggest challenge to your success.

Your coaches feel it and often don't know how to handle parent dissatisfaction.

The answer to this pervasive dilemma is **to invest in ongoing resources that re-shape the attitudes and behaviors of well-meaning parents who are operating without an "owner's manual."**

Parents desperately want information about how to improve the chances of success for their children. However in the absence of good information they will make up stuff – and that's seldom good!

Parent education that is designed to address the following topics will reduce the number of issues you must handle, the frustrations your coaches must face, and the number of athletes you lose each year.

- How a parent should talk to their child about performance challenges;
- How parents can respond to their child when they're discouraged or want to quit;
- How to teach children about commitment, self-discipline, and motivation;
- How and when to let a child struggle with both emotional and physical challenges;
- How to address negativity, learning plateaus, fear and self-doubt;
- How to teach children the connection between effort and results;
 - How to place the proper emphasis on character development in the context of healthy competitiveness;
 - How to demonstrate high levels of trust in a coach's process of teaching;



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Formats for Delivering Parent Education – “The Buffet Table Approach”

Like your athletes, your parents **learn through a variety of information vehicles**, and that means you cannot rely on only one method of communicating.

Some parents prefer reading, others prefer listening. Videos will grab the attention of some parents while others want to participate in live presentations.

Too often gyms rely on a single parent meeting at the beginning of the season to carry the load of their “parent excellence” message.

Education is like bathing; **you have to do it regularly**. This also why placing an article or two on your web site for parents, and leaving it there all year does not constitute a parent education program.

The ideal parent education program is a living, breathing, frequently renewed, and inspiring resource that parents come to trust and rely upon.

Here are some of the tools to consider - in addition to the traditional parents meeting at the beginning of a season.

1. Live Seminars:

Bring in experts from outside your organization who can share strategies with parents on a variety of topics. Experts from the outside are generally viewed as credible because they don't have an agenda to protect within your organization.

This may be hard on your ego because you know the same stuff the expert knows, but accept the fact that outsiders can have a huge impact on your parents' attitudes and behaviors.

Leverage this phenomenon to your advantage at least twice per year.

2. Web Site Content:

Place meaningful and helpful resources on a designated “Parents” page of your web site like, video tips, articles, audio interviews and webinars by recognized experts in youth sports. This content **should be refreshed every 30 days** with something new. Promote this resource to your parents so they know it's available to them 24/7 as a place to find answers and ideas for their family.

3. Parent Huddles with a Coach:

Teach your coaches and encourage them to have short regular “standup huddles” with parents. These informal 10 minute sessions can have a huge benefit in keeping parents in the loop about what athletes are working on – and NOT working on – during any part of the season.



Parents who feel included in the information loop are less likely to fabricate answers or to criticize. Parents have a right to know what's going on with their children and they will appreciate direct communication.

In the triad of Athlete – Coach – Parent, there is no doubt that parents are the ones with a tremendous amount of influence over a child's experience, and yet they are typically the most under-coached and miss-informed part of the program. Increase your commitment to parent education and **watch your program's reputation soar** as being truly unique, family-centered, holistic, and irreplaceable to every family member.