

# 23 Qualities of a Great Teammate



Being a great teammate is far more important than being a great player.

Let's face it...

Chances are that you will never coach a player who goes on to play professional basketball at a high level (the chances are slim).

And if you do, the number will pale in comparison to the number of players you coach who will never play any basketball professionally.

But every single one of the players you're coaching are going to grow up, get a job, and will be expected to be a contributing member of their community.

**So how can we best prepare our players for the rest of their lives?**

**By teaching them how to be great teammates.**

Many of the qualities that players develop on their journey to being a great teammate will help their future out tremendously.

In fact, every one of the 23 qualities of a great teammate listed below are the exact qualities that make someone a great co-worker.

Your players might not recognize the importance now, but they will one day.

And they will thank you.

Here are 23 qualities all great teammates possess...

## **1. A great teammate develops real relationships with their teammates**

Great relationships between teammates is an important foundation for the success of any team.

Success does not necessarily mean winning (although it includes it), but rather the enjoyment had by those involved on the team throughout the season and looking back on it.

To develop deep and real relationships between teammates, players must get to know their teammates as more than people they throw around a basketball with on the court a few times a week.

**Players must get to know who their teammates are as people outside of basketball. That's where true relationships and trust develops.**

This involves learning about their family, their likes and dislikes, who their favorite NBA team is, who their favorite NBA players are, etc.

It's the responsibility of every player on the team to be willing to seek out this information and also to share themselves with others.

Players will quickly find out that being connected off the court often leads to being connected on the court.

## **2. A great teammate brings their teammates together**

As a great teammate is focusing on developing real relationships with all players on the team, it will quickly become obvious that others aren't always focused on doing this.

This isn't necessarily because they're bad teammates... Rather, they might feel too shy, they might already have a few teammates they're comfortable with, or they simply don't realize the importance of building real relationships with all teammates.

**Great teammates do their best to bring together teammates and give them an opportunity to build a better relationship.**

Here are a few examples of how you could do this:

- Invite teammates to the local swimming pool.
- Invite teammates over for a BBQ or dinner.
- Invite teammates for extra shooting practice.
- Invite teammates to the movies.

The worst thing that can happen on a team is when little 'cliques' of teammates form. This leads to the team being divided into small groups of 3 or 4 people who only hang out with each other.

Strive to develop a real relationship with all your teammates and help them do it too!

### 3. A great teammate is willing to play any role on the team

*(Disclaimer: For youth basketball, I believe in even playing time for all players until the final 5 minutes of the game.)*

**A great teammate is willing to play any role on the team that gives their team the best chance of being successful.**

The players that are willing to do this have a 'team-first' attitude and sacrifice their own goals and accomplishments for what's in the best interest of the team.

'We' before 'Me'.

When discussing role on the team, I prefer to break it down into two different categories to stop players from getting confused between the two.

#### **a. The amount of minutes you play each game.**

Being willing to accept a reduction in minutes while keeping a great attitude is crucial for all basketball players.

If you keep progressing to different levels of basketball, unless you're a LeBron James or Michael Jordan it is almost an absolute certainty that at some stage in your basketball career you'll find yourself stuck at the end of the bench.

Players averaging 30 points and 10 rebounds a game in high school often find themselves relegated to the end of the bench playing 2 minutes a game when they begin their college career.

The exact same thing happens when players enter the NBA. They often go from college basketball superstars to battling for a position on an NBA roster and potentially quickly forgotten about.

This will happen to all players at some point. Be ready for it when it does.

A great teammate is willing to embrace their new role without losing their enthusiasm for the game.

Even if you feel like you deserve more minutes or that you're a better player than a teammate receiving more time than you, you must accept the coach's decision and continue to give 100% effort when your opportunities do come.

#### **b. Your role when you're on the basketball court.**

The other type of role that may change is what a player is required to do and focus on during games.

There are many players that are high-volume scorers in high school, but when they get to the college level, their new team doesn't need their high-volume scoring.

Rather, they might be great a defender and are required to lock down the opponents best player.

The most important thing for players to remember is that the role they play is going to be constantly changing throughout their basketball playing days.

Be willing to embrace each and every role you receive and **remember to play for the name on the front of the jersey, not the one on the back.**

*“Players have to buy into your system and be willing to accept the role, you, as the coach, have assigned to them.” – Chuck Daly*

*“You must be unselfish and accept the role that helps the team the most.” – Tom Crean*

*“We believe in people executing their role and caring about the team more than anything individually.” – Gregg Popovich*

## **4. A great teammate always gives their maximum effort**

Every player must understand that the effort they give at practice and during games is 100% in their control at all times.

Coming off the bench and only playing 5 minutes a game? **Give maximum effort.**

Your team’s down by 30 points in the 4th quarter? **Give maximum effort.**

You’re at practice at 8am on a Sunday? **Give maximum effort.**

There’s simply no excuse to ever give less than your best. If you do, you’re letting your teammates and coaching staff down.

Every player can have a bad shooting night. No player should ever have a bad effort night. Effort is always a choice.

*“Sometimes, things may not go your way, but the effort should be there every single night.” – Michael Jordan*

*“I can live with about anything, but not lack of effort. If you want to play in the game, you must give me 100 percent.” – Roy Williams*

*“Effort is fully replenishable. There is no need to save any of it. Leave every bit you have on the playing field.” – Mike Krzyzewski*

## **5. A great teammate works hard to improve their game**

While a great teammate doesn’t have to be the hardest worker on the team as some coaches often say, a great teammate must be willing to work hard to improve their game outside of team practices.

**When you commit to playing a team sport, you commit to improving your game individually for the betterment of the team.**

If you don’t continue to improve as a basketball player, you’re letting your teammates and coaching staff down by not doing your best to fulfill your potential as a basketball player.

Doing this also has the added benefit that it will improve your role on the team and allow you to contribute more to the team’s success.

When your teammates see you working hard and improving your game, they’ll want to do the same!

## 6. A great teammate always leads by example

A great teammate doesn't always lead with their words, but they always lead with their actions.

You can't expect others to be great teammates if you're not willing to lead the way and prove to yourself and others that you are one.

Here are a few examples how a player can lead by example:

- Be the first one in the gym and the last one to leave.
- Give 100% effort at all times.
- Listen to your coach when they're talking.
- Mentally preparing themselves before practice and games.
- Being on time.
- Have a positive, energetic attitude.
- Not talking back to the referees.
- Hustling back on defense.
- Diving on the floor for loose balls.
- Being prepared to take charges.
- Staying engaged on the bench.
- Encouraging other teammates.
- Seriously, this list could go on forever...

**Never underestimate the importance of your example.**

## 7. A great teammate is always prepared before practices and games

To be a great teammate you must ensure you're prepared for every practice and every game.

By doing so, your teammates and coaching staff can be confident that you're ready to perform at your very best when you step on the court.

Here are a few ways you to make to make sure you're prepared:

- Always make sure you're properly stretched and warmed up before the start of practice or a game.
- If you have them, put in the time to study scouting report on your next opponent.
- Properly stretch and cool down after practices and games to ensure that the next time you play your body will be recovered.
- Ensure you consume the healthy food and adequate liquids before practices and games.
- Know your team's playbook like the back of your hand. Study it. Know all the movements and actions of all the players on the floor.
- Know the importance of your pre-game routine and follow it so that you're mentally ready when it's time to play.

*"It's in the daily preparation. The willingness to be the first guy at practice and the last one to leave. Taking the time to get extra shots up. Studying the game. Watching film. Taking care of your body."  
– Derek Fisher*

*"I don't believe in luck. I believe in preparation." – Bobby Knight*

*"We understand what goes into winning and that the battle is won or lost long before its fought. It comes from preparation." – Tom Thibodeau*



## **8. A great teammate understands their own strengths and weaknesses**

Being able to self-evaluate your game to determine what your strengths and weaknesses are is crucial to being a great teammate.

To put it simply; **you must know what you're good at and you must know what you need to improve.**

Once you determine these, focus on doing what you're good at during games, and focus on and commit to improving your weaknesses during practices and you own time.

You'll never be a great teammate if you're throwing up three-point shots during a game when you know you're a poor three-point shooter.

A player like Dennis Rodman is a world-class rebounder and a player who understood that him shooting from the outside wasn't something that was going to help his team win (except oddly in the 1991 – 1992 season with Detroit).

So he didn't do it. He focused on his strengths.

That's what all players need to do.

By doing the things you're good at and not doing the things you're bad at, you're being a great teammate and putting your team in the best position to be successful.

*"The key to any game is to use your strengths and hide your weaknesses." – Paul Westphal*

*"I know the strengths and weaknesses of my teammates. I make my passing decisions accordingly." – Steve Nash*

## **9. A great teammate always has a positive and energetic attitude**

A great teammate is consistently positive regardless of the situation and always has a high amount of energy and enthusiasm.

Nothing is more detrimental to a team than negativity.

Every player must know that if they are negative, it will always spread. That's why teams have to avoid it at all costs. And when it does happen, address the negativity and come up with a solution immediately.

Conversely, **all great teammates know that their positivity and enthusiasm will rub off onto the other members of the team.**

Even if they don't feel fantastic that day, they are able to put all the negativities behind them when they step into the gym and become a positive and fun source of energy.

When the intensity of a practice is down, they never hesitate to do all they can to lift the intensity and create a fun and competitive environment.

Whether the team's down by 30 points or it's an 8am practice session, a great teammate always stays positive and appreciates the opportunity they have to play the game of basketball.

*"Any guy who can maintain a positive attitude without much playing time earns my respect." – Magic Johnson*

*"I'm looking for players who make their teammates better. You do that with enthusiasm and passion." – Mike Krzyzewski*

*"Promise to be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own." – John Wooden*

## 10. A great teammate always displays positive body language

Body language is something nearly all players overlook the importance of.

How often do you see a player roll their eyes at an official, coach, or teammate, and then when they're called out on it, they yell "But I didn't say anything!?"

It happens all the time.

So please, please listen and understand this: **Body language is everything.**

A player will communicate more of their true feelings through their body language than what they say when they speak.

For those looking to get recruited to colleges; body language and interaction with teammates is always listed very high on the list of what college coaches look for when they're scouting.

Here are a few examples of negative body language:

- Rolling your eyes.
- Throwing your hands up in the air after a teammate makes a mistake.
- Mouthing curse words.
- Sighing and looking down after a teammate's mistake.

Here are a few examples of positive body language:

- Clapping for a teammate.
- Giving high-fives.
- Standing up from the bench after a great play.
- Pointing at a teammate after receiving a great pass.

## 11. A great teammate has a sense of humor and has fun!

No matter what level of basketball you're currently playing, having fun must always be a high priority.

Even Gregg Popovich, the coach of one of the most consistently great teams for nearly two decades, constantly emphasizes the importance of the Spurs having fun and keeping a sense of humor...

*"Having a sense of humor is huge to me and to our staff because I think if people can't be self-deprecating or laugh at themselves or enjoy a funny situation, they have a hard time giving themselves to the group. – Gregg Popovich"*

**To be a great teammate, you must contribute to keeping the team environment fun, light-hearted, and enjoyable at all times.**

You must be willing to take the occasional joke or two post-game after you missed a wide open layup or did something funny during the game.

There's not much point playing basketball if you're not enjoying it!

## 12. A great teammate holds themselves and others accountable to the commitment they made to the team

When you sign up to a team, you must understand what that commitment entails.

- You're committing to attend practices.
- You're committing to attend games.
- You're committing to improve your game outside of practice.
- You're committing to attending film sessions.
- You're committing to memorizing the playbook.
- You're committing to volunteer when the team needs you.

Basically, you're committing to a lot.

**Great teammates understand the commitment they have made and are willing to hold themselves accountable to these commitments.**

Great teammates are also willing to hold their teammates accountable to the commitment they made to the team.

Holding others accountable is never easy. It takes a strong-minded teammate to be willing to take a teammate to the side and politely remind them of the commitment they made to the team.

But the first step is always holding yourself accountable. Don't even think about holding anyone else accountable until you're able to do it yourself.

*"The most important quality I look for in a player is accountability. You've got to be accountable for who you are. It's too easy to blame things on someone else." – Lenny Wilkins*

*"If you don't have accountability you will not improve." – Brad Stevens*

*"On good teams, coaches hold players accountable, on great teams players hold players accountable." – Joe Dumars*

## 13. A great teammate understands how to deliver praise and criticism

Knowing how to deliver praise and criticism to a teammate without offending them is one of the most important traits of a great teammate.

Here is the big rule that all players must remember:

**Criticise teammates in private. Compliment teammates in public.**

*(Disclaimer: Criticising teammates in private is best done by senior members of the team in the older age groups. This shouldn't happen in youth basketball. Leave it to the coach.)*

When you see one of your teammates doing something that's negatively affecting the team, instead of yelling at them in front of their teammates and the coaching staff, say something to them in private.

This could be in regards to basketball related things such as not making the extra pass on offense or non-basketball things like talking negatively about another player.

Ensure that you don't make a big deal out of it and that if they want to walk away you allow them to, but look them in the eye address the subject.

While they often won't say it, the player will appreciate you bringing up the subject in private rather than making a big deal about it in front of the entire team.

When it comes to delivering praise to your teammates, a great teammate will do this often and do it in front of the entire team.

When a teammate makes an extra pass or completes a great play, never hesitate about praising them for it in front of the team.

It will raise the confidence of the player, strengthen the relationship between you two, and there's a much higher chance that they'll make the same team-first play in the future!

*"Shout praise and whisper criticism." – Don Meyer*

*"A group becomes a team when each member is sure enough of himself and his contribution to praise the skills of the others." -Norman Shidle*

*"You can't let praise or criticism get to you. It's a weakness to get caught up in either one." – John Wooden*

## **14. A great teammate is willing to accept feedback from their teammates**

Just as being a great teammate involves you knowing how to deliver feedback to your teammates, you must be willing and open to accept feedback from them too.

Whether you're giving or receiving feedback will often depend on your role on the team. You might go from giving feedback to teammates in high school to receiving feedback from teammates when you're playing college basketball.

### **A great teammate is always open to feedback.**

Don't get defensive when they're talking to you. Pay attention to what they're saying and then apply it.

Even if you disagree with their feedback and choose not to follow it, don't act negatively towards them or you'll risk hurting a relationship with a teammate.

Always hear them out.

## 15. A great teammate supports others when they're struggling

**To be a great teammate you must truly care about the other members of your team.**

If you see any of your teammates looking down, you should always be willing to take a few moments to check that they're okay and see if they need a friend to talk to.

This is best done in private as a lot of players will feel embarrassed and laugh it off if this question is posed to them in a public setting.

Even if they say they're fine, they'll appreciate the gesture of you asking them and it will deepen the relationship that you've developed with them.

If they do say something's wrong, be willing to be a good listener and hear what's on their mind and possibly provide a few words of support to lift their spirits.

A few kind words or simply being asked if they're okay can mean the world to a player who is having difficulties at school or at home.

## 16. A great teammate never places blame or finds excuses for a loss

How many times have you heard a player make an excuse after losing a close game?

*"The courts were slippery!"*

*"The referee didn't call the foul!"*

*"Jimmy should have boxed out his player!"*

*"Sam should have made the open shot!"*

A great teammate never makes up excuses or points blame to a single play after the team loses a game.

They understand that a game of basketball is long and full of plenty of mistakes that accumulate to decide the final score of the game.

**More importantly, they understand that keeping a great team environment and having fun are much more important than securing the win.**

Never create a negative environment and hurt relationships with teammates by pointing blame!

## 17. A great teammate is reliable, honest, and trustworthy

I decided to include all three of these characteristics together because being reliable and honest eventually leads to being trustworthy.

Let's focus on each of them separately...

### a. Reliable

A great teammate is always reliable. If they say they're going to do something, you can guarantee that it's going to get done.

If they say they will be at practice 30 minutes early, they'll be at practice 30 minutes early.

### b. Honest

There's no worse feeling for a player than not being confident whether their teammate is telling the truth or not.

A great teammate must always be honest. If you make a mistake, own up to it.

### c. Trustworthy

If you can be a reliable and honest teammate, that will lead to your teammates and coaching staff being able to trust you.

Your teammates must be able to trust that you're 100% committed to the team and have bought into what they team's trying to do.

*"Good teams become great ones when the members trust each other enough to surrender the 'me' for the 'we'." – Phil Jackson*

*"We are unselfish and we trust each other." – Tim Duncan*

*"When players trust and believe in each other, it's a simple thing. But that really is something that makes a team great." – Bob Huggins*



## **18. A great teammate respects the game, everyone involved, and the facilities**

When most players think about respect, they only think about respecting the head coach as they are the adult and person who decides their court time.

But when it comes to being a basketball player, there is much more to respect than that just the head coach.

- Players must respect the coach.
- Players must respect their teammates.
- Players must respect their opponents.
- Players must respect the supporters.
- Players must respect the officials.
- Players must respect the facilities they're playing in.
- Players must respect the game of basketball.

Without respect, you can never be a great teammate.

## **19. A great teammate keeps themselves in great physical condition**

If you don't do your best to keep yourself in great physical condition, you're letting your teammates down.

**This doesn't mean you need to be 2% bodyfat and able to run a marathon, but it does mean your body should allow you to give your best effort when you're on the floor.**

Here are a few things you can do to keep your body in great shape:

- Eat relatively clean throughout the season.
- Eat a nutritious meal on game-day that will give you the energy to compete.
- Hydrate your body before games and practices.
- Get enough sleep each night.
- Stay strong by regularly going to the gym.
- Block out time for cardio training throughout the week.

Players must be aware that all things mentioned above are 100% in their control.

Every player can keep their body in great physical condition and ready for competitive games of basketball if they choose to.

## **20. A great teammate consistently encourages their teammates**

This might tie lightly into some of the other points I've mentioned throughout the article, but it can't hurt to emphasize its importance again.

**A great teammate is a constant stream of encouragement and support for their teammates.**

Encouraging others at practice and during games raises the intensity of practice, strengthens your relationships with those players, and lets your teammates know that their hard work and team-first play doesn't go unnoticed.

A great teammate should be encouraging everyone. Congratulating and praising players that are making great plays as well as encouraging players who are struggling to perform better.

And the best thing? Once you start encouraging players and being vocal, your teammates will often do this too!

Sometimes all it takes is some positive encourage from a teammate to change the mindset of a player during practice or a game.

## **21. A great teammate gives extra help to inexperienced or new players**

The teammates that need the most encouragement and help are often the new or inexperienced players.

A great teammate will give special attention and encouragement to these players to make them feel more comfortable on the team.

Here are a few ways to do this:

- Hang out with the new player before practice or a game.
- Catching up with them outside of basketball.
- Helping them through drills and plays they're unfamiliar with.
- Giving them extra words of encouragement.

It can be a massive confidence boost for these players if they know one of the senior or more skilled players on the team has their back.

## **22. A great teammate is engaged and positive when they're on the bench**

One of the most obvious places you can see which players are good teammates and which players aren't is when they're on the bench.

**Sitting back, complaining about a lack of playing time, and looking disinterested are clear signs to all coaches, players, supporters, and recruiters that you're not a good teammate.**

Even if you believe deep in your heart that you deserve more playing time and you're frustrated about your lack of it, you must stay engaged and positive on the bench.

No exceptions.

**Great teammates understand how much the energy of the bench influences the outcome and enjoyment of the game being played.**

Here are some of the things great teammates do when they're on the bench:

- Sit forward and stay engaged in the game.
- Call out screens being set by the opposition.
- Call out opposition plays or defensive changes.
- Cheer and encourage their teammates.
- Notice the tendencies of the player you'll be guarding.
- Find holes or weak links in the defense you can take advantage of.

*"You can tell a lot about a recruit by just watching how they warm up and how they act on the bench." – Rick Majerus*

*"Players that have energy when they're on the bench are far more likely to impact games in a positive way when they're in the game." – Tom Crean*

## **23. A great teammate understands the importance of being a great teammate**

Last but certainly not least, a great teammate understands the positive impact that being a great teammate has on the team and the overall happiness of the season.

- Life-long friendships will be developed.
- The season will be enjoyable for everyone.
- A great environment for players to foster their love of basketball.
- Fond memories to look back on.
- Greater chance of the team being successful.

Conversely, a great teammate understands what the consequences are of being or having negative teammates.

- The team will have poor team chemistry.
- The season will be less fun for everyone.
- There will be less learning throughout the season.
- Memories you look back on negatively.
- Less chance of the team being successful.

## Conclusion

The most important thing that all players must understand is that they do not need to be a great player to be a great teammate.

And everyone (regardless of talent, age, size, or skill) can be a great teammate.

You don't need to possess all 23 qualities to be considered a great teammate, but you should strive to achieve them all.

In summary...

- A great teammate develops real relationships with their teammates
- A great teammate brings their teammates together
- A great teammate is willing to play any role on the team
- A great teammate is willing to play any role on the team
- A great teammate works hard to improve their game
- A great teammate always leads by example
- A great teammate is always prepared before practices and games
- A great teammate understands their own strengths and weaknesses
- A great teammate always has a positive and energetic attitude
- A great teammate always displays positive body language
- A great teammate has a sense of humor and has fun!
- A great teammate holds themselves and others accountable to the commitment they made to the team
- A great teammate understands how to deliver praise and criticism
- A great teammate is willing to accept feedback from their teammates
- A great teammate supports others when they're struggling
- A great teammate never places blame or finds excuses for a loss
- A great teammate is reliable, honest, and trustworthy
- A great teammate respects the game, everyone involved, and the facilities
- A great teammate keeps themselves in great physical condition
- A great teammate consistently encourages their teammates
- A great teammate gives extra help to inexperienced or new players
- A great teammate is engaged and positive when they're on the bench
- A great teammate understands the importance of being a great teammate

- Coach Mac