Every person comes across a situation in life where he or she needs to assume the role of a torch bearer and lead rest of his/her team through the dark tunnel. This person may not be an appointed leader but steps in the role as circumstances demand for it. I too was in a similar situation where I had to undertake the role of a leader. It was in twelfth grade, I was on my school’s table tennis team and we had a state level table tennis tournament approaching.

After 3 months of rigorous training and hard work, my team was ready to represent our college at the State Level Table tennis tournament. We had prepared very well for these matches and were looking forward to it. The tournament was held at a venue that was thirteen hours away. Our coach decided to leave for the venue two days prior to the game as he wanted to ensure that the team is well rested and is high on energy.

Everything went per the plan until the day of the tournament arrived. Our coach had to go back to our city as there was an unavoidable family emergency that needed his attention. My team became nervous and was having a tough time dealing with this change. This started to reflect in their performances during the matches. Since, I was the senior in the team, with coach gone, I decided to take the responsibility for my team (6). I knew that my team had the potential to win the tournament, however, with the coach not there to guide, the team was feeling stranded and this was affecting their performance. To earn their trust, I called for a team huddle and said “This is the time to make our coach proud! All of us have worked really hard to get here, including our coach, we have to give our best. State tournament is just another match! We for Victory!” (3).

I also started helping my team during the matches. I gave them directions, advised them about the opponent’s odd tactics and how to break the rally to earn a point, but most importantly I kept on encouraging them, just as a coach would do (7). Within no time, I could see a change in each player’s body language, the atmosphere in the team room changed, team members started helping each other throughout the tournament (2). We won match after match and breezed through the finals. Believe it or not, that year, our school won the State Table Tennis titles in 4 of the 5 tournament categories.

In the interest of my team’s hard work and potential to win the tournament, I stepped into the role of a leader. In my opinion, I was an effective leader, because, I earned my team’s trust, recognized their potential and addressed their insecurity (1). I was also effectively able to apply “personal power”, I connected with the team at emotional level by reminding them about the efforts that all of us had put in for this tournament (4). Being the senior member on the team I was also able to maintain certain level of authority over the team (5). Later when we returned home, I was recognized for my act of leadership by my school.

In retrospection, as it was the first time that I had stepped into role of a leader I feel that there are couple of things which I could have done differently. Primarily, my approach towards the situation was very naïve. I realized the graveness of the situation a little late when I saw my team members struggling in the tournament. A leader gauges the situation well in advance and is always ready with a contingency plan. Secondly, I focused more on rewarding solo performances. Even though in this situation it worked out well as my team won all the single player matches, it is always advisable to reward both the team as well the individual performances (4). Finally, I could not practice tough empathy. I fiercely cared about my team and their emotional stage during the tournament but lacked sentiment of similar intensity towards their performance (5).

In conclusion, I have learnt that leadership requires plethora of knowledge and skills, it cannot be learnt through a single effective experience. Hence, I will continue to strive for improving myself as a leader.

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