



Leading Without a Title

Your Guide to Leading Like a Captain Before Being Named One

As a member of the United, you are part of an organization that cares about providing you the resources you need to grow as a player, teammate, and person. That growth doesn't just come from practices and games, it also comes from how you carry yourself and support the people around you.

Here's the truth: Real leaders don't need titles. They earn respect from teammates, coaches, bosses, colleagues, employees, and customers by being consistent and by lifting others up. Whether you're on the field or off, your actions, attitude, and effort can set the tone for others around you. In a 2024 survey, 94% of female CEOs said sports gave them the chance to learn what it means to be a leader, long before reaching the boardroom. Whether your 14U, 16U, or 18U, don't fall for the myth that you've got it all figured out. You don't. None of us do. But every practice, every game, every moment is a chance to learn how to lead. And the best leaders? They never stop learning.

This guide is here to help you understand how to lead like a captain, even before you are named one. It's about setting the tone, building trust, and making a positive impact, with or without the title. So, here are four ways you can start building leadership skills and putting them into practice:

1. Be Proactive

Whether you're aiming to be a team captain or you simply want to see your team succeed, be someone who takes initiative. Offer to help set up equipment, check in on a teammate who's having a tough day, or speak up when you see a more effective way to achieve a goal. Even if you don't have a leadership title, being proactive shows you care about the bigger picture.

2. Listen to Learn (Not Respond)

Does this sound familiar? A coach or teammate comes to you, frustrated about something that happened during the game, and before they even finish talking, you're already thinking, "Can you PLEASE stop talking so I can explain why I'm right and you're wrong?" It's easy to fall into that trap. But real leadership starts with listening to learn, not just waiting for your turn to talk. When you try to understand where someone's coming from, you build trust and stronger relationships, even if you don't agree with everything they say.

3. Lead by Example

As a captain, your attitude, effort, and how you treat others set the tone for the whole team. It's not about being perfect; it's about being consistent and showing others what it looks like to do things the right way.

4. Be a Positive Force

Being a positive force doesn't just mean being loud, fun, or cheering for the teammates you're closest with. It means showing respect to "every" teammate, whether you naturally click with them or not. Leaders don't pick favorites. They support everyone.

As a captain, you don't need to be close with every person on the team. But your words and actions should NEVER make another teammate feel small, ignored, or excluded. Being a positive force means lifting the whole team. It means choosing to be mature enough to move on from old drama. It means treating others the way you'd want to be treated. That's how leaders build unity and earn their stripes.

The Bottom Line

If you want to be a team captain, ask yourself: Am I someone who others want to follow? Not just the people I'm closest with, but the entire team. Do I show up for everyone?

Remember, leadership starts with how you treat "all" people, how you handle challenges, and how you unite others together. You do not need a title to be a leader. But how you carry yourself today is what earns you the chance to wear a title tomorrow. In short, your path to becoming a team captain, manager, director, VP, or CEO starts with that, showing the attributes of a leader without waiting to be named one.